

THE ARGOSY.

JUNE, 1879.

CALLED TO THE RESCUE.

CHAPTER XVI.

A NEW FRIEND.

WHEN Paul Rocket, at the desire of his master, seconded by the advice of Sir Marcus Combermere, undertook the office of keeping watch over Cosmo Dangerfield's movements, he did so with a full appreciation of the risk that he ran. While in that great philosopher's employment, he had necessarily become a sharer of some of the secrets on which the success of his philosophy depended; and had, indeed, been admitted deeper into the mysteries than any other acolyte of his age. That the Professor would resent his leaving his service as he had done, and cordially embracing the cause of Miss Stormount, as he had now made up his mind to do, Paul had no doubt whatever; and his only surprise was, that he had suppressed his resentment so long. What would be the result of a meeting between them, he felt was quite uncertain; he had a lurking dread of his late master's skill and knowledge, and was by no means disposed to brave them unprepared. But his professional training gave him several advantages of which he was not slow to avail himself; and being fortified with a good store of provision in his pockets, and supplied with cash to purchase more, if wanted, he was ready to lie in ambush, or play the spy, all day long; keeping himself carefully out of Dangerfield's sight, but never relaxing his watch on all that he did.

The necessity of concealing his own person made it impossible for him to come to Emily's assistance in time; all he could do, he did. He ran across the fields, regardless of the snow; caught

the coach as it passed, and without requiring it to stop, jumped up behind like a monkey. The guard was too much diverted with his agility to take offence; and the other outside passengers, being only two sturdy farmers, had compassion on the boy's wet clothes, and lent him a thick great-coat, in which he was glad to disguise himself from any eye that might be too inquisitive for safety.

In some of Ernest's suffering hours lately, he had amused himself with his page's experiences, and had learned of him a code of private signals and communications, very useful in such conjuring as requires a confederate. Paul, as he crouched between two great hampers, in his frieze coat, recollected this, and felt sure his master would do the same. He had pencil and paper at hand, and soon prepared missives which would be unintelligible to any reader but Mr. Archdale.

"He will follow himself, if the breath is in his body," he thought, "and he will never grudge money in such a cause." And wherever the coach stopped, and it was possible to do so, one of these cabalistic messages was left in somebody's keeping, backed by a shilling fee, and the assurance that Mr. Archdale would give another.

Coach hire and fees to messengers made some inroad on Paul's finances, but he contrived to keep the chase in sight to the inn where they had their meal, hanging about the stable first, and making friends with the hostler, and then repeating the performance in the bar. Here he heard that the gentleman and his daughter were going by the seven o'clock train, and had his dispatch prepared accordingly. Concealed behind a post, he saw the Professor put Emily into a fly, and, just before getting in himself, give an order to the driver. What it was he could not hear; but favoured by the darkness he jumped up at the back of the carriage, and soon saw that they were going in a different direction from the one he had been led to expect. The place was all new to his experience, and when he judged it wiser to relinquish his perch, it required no little activity to follow the fly to its destination. Once there, however, he had no more difficulty, except to ascertain to what station the Professor was going.

"Can one get to London this way?" he asked a porter, and was informed that he could, only he would have to change and wait a certain time at one of the great junctions: accordingly Paul took a ticket to that junction, trusting to the chapter of accidents for getting further, as he had not quite half a crown left. Of this residue, another shilling went in leaving a message, and what to do without a fresh supply he could not clearly see.

"I must stop their running, somehow or other," he thought, "or they'll throw me out altogether." And the reflection that Emily had recognised him, and was aware that he was following, strung his nerves to the pitch of daring all consequences, sooner than lose the advantage he had gained. He saw them alight, and had just time to station himself on the bridge, with a cord ready noosed for such

a trick as had more than once brought him applause in the circus. The Professor, unwitting of the science so near at hand, allowed his foot to be caught. The consequences we have seen in his heavy fall, and the separation from his step-daughter: whom we have left all this while, as he left her, huddling her dog to her bosom, and not knowing whether to go on or turn back.

Her suspense was soon ended, by feeling an arm of protection against the pressure of the crowd, while a voice in her ear sounded like music.

"All right, Miss Emily; I'll take care of you and Coco."

The child's innocent faith had never failed; she had believed what her friends told her, and it seemed quite natural that help should come. She gave up Coco without hesitation, and put her hand in Paul's, with a sense of security and comfort that compensated for the troubles of the journey. He hurried her back to the platform they had just quitted, and, unobserved by anyone, gained the door of the station. The lights of the town gleamed brightly at a little distance; they were standing on the highroad, and as Paul looked up and down no vehicle was in sight.

"Miss Emily, can you walk a little way, do you think?" said he, cheerfully. "I daresay we shall find some house where you can rest, if you can hold out till then."

The fact was, though he did not tell her so, the vision of Cosmo Dangerfield returning in a state of exasperation to reclaim his companion, or telegraphing to have her stopped, convinced Paul that the first thing to be done was to hide her somewhere; and though he knew nothing of the locality, he was sure there would be some inn where she might be sheltered, if only they could reach it in time. There was no return train for several hours, and Paul would gladly have remained at the station, had it been safe; but, besides the risk of being detained, he had seen as they passed the waiting-room that it was being locked up, and there was nothing for it but to find better quarters further on. Emily assured him she was not tired. Indeed, the relief of exercise and the joy of deliverance seemed to put fresh vigour into her limbs, as she stepped out on the hard, frosty road in perfect confidence that Paul knew where to go, and that they should soon come to a house, with a warm fire.

"Did they send you, Paul?" was her first question, when they had walked a little way. He was listening for the sound of the departing trains, and did not answer. "Did they send you, Paul?" Then Paul explained that he had seen her put into the coach, and as he thought she did not like it, determined to follow, and help her to go back to Miss Granard.

"How very kind of you, Paul. Are we going back to her now?"

"We cannot start before morning, Miss Emily. Have you any money with you?"

"No, but I have some locked up in Adela's box."

"That won't help us much," was Paul's inward reflection, as he thought of his eighteenpence, and the impossibility of paying railway fares, or telegraphic messages, out of the surplus. But he hinted nothing of this to Emily, only talked cheerily about the good supper Coco would have presently, and thence diverged into stories about other dogs, of wonderful sagacity and unmatched cleverness, beguiling the way as best he could, while discovering it to be much longer than he had at first supposed. The wind, too, had risen, and in spite of her warm cloak he felt the child shiver, and every minute made him more and more anxious to find a warm shelter for her head. No pursuit being attempted, though he looked back from time to time, almost expecting to hear a policeman summon him to stop, he began to revolve in his mind by what expedient he could obtain a supply of money with which to convey her home. Several schemes presented themselves to his fertile imagination, but all contained some insuperable difficulty in being carried out; and while still weighing two of these against each other, he was roused by a carriage rattling past him so suddenly, that the coachman shouted as he passed that he had better take care where he was going.

"It would be very nice to drive in that carriage," said Emily, "and here comes another—oh, and another. There must be a party somewhere."

So Paul perceived, and that they were near the house, for they had reached the suburb of the town, full of detached residences, standing within gates, a pair of which had been thrown open for the ingress and egress of visitors and their equipages. Before he was aware, he had been driven with his charge to the shelter of some evergreens within the precincts, to avoid being run over by two carriages, each trying to get before the other. The wind was now blowing keenly, and some sharp sleet drove into their faces; making her cling to him for protection, with a gasping, "Oh, Paul—Paul!"

"Why don't you go on to the house?" shouted the coachman nearest to the two, supposing the young lady to be one of the guests, living near enough to walk to her evening's amusement. It really looked easier to go forward than to return, for more carriages were behind, and if only Emily could be sheltered under the portico for five minutes, while he asked his way to the nearest inn, it would be something. So Paul pushed on to the portico.

"This way, if you please," cried a civil servant at the open door: and Emily, without knowing what was going to be done with her, was shown into a warm room full of ladies' cloaks and shawls, and the door closed behind her.

The careless maid who ought to have been on duty in that apartment had left it for a chat and a cup of tea on her own score. The tired child, after waiting a little while for some one to tell her what to do, sat down among the shawls and cloaks. As may easily

be imagined, she was very soon fast asleep, with her head on the fur lining of one of the mantles; the distant sound of music and dancing feet mingling with her dreams.

She woke suddenly with a start, and sat up, not knowing where she was, or what had happened to her. But her hand was taken by one that was very soft and tender, and a kind voice said, "Do not be frightened, my dear, but tell me who you are."

Emily looked up, and her senses becoming a little clearer, she perceived that an old lady was bending over her; such an old lady as she had sometimes seen in pictures, with lovely white hair, a sweet smile, and a gracious manner. So gracious, that the child was calmed unconsciously, and answered without hesitation.

"I am Emily Stormount, ma'am."

"And why does Emily Stormount go to sleep on my cloak, instead of going home to bed?" asked the white-haired stranger, sitting down by the little girl's side, without relinquishing her hand.

"I can't go home to bed till to-morrow morning. And the wind blew very cold, and the carriages crowded so, we had to come in to get out of the way; and the man put me in here."

"You did not come to the dance then, my little woman?"

"No, but I thought it must be very nice and warm when I saw the lights in the windows. Please, ma'am, may I have Coco?"

"Cocoa, my dear? To drink, do you mean?" asked the old lady, somewhat surprised, as well she might be.

"No, ma'am, he is my dog, and Paul is carrying him for me. Paul is very kind; he never cares how long he carries him."

"And who is Paul?"

"I don't quite know who he is, but he is now Mr. Archdale's servant, and he is taking me home."

"If this is the way he takes you home, dear child, you will be a long time getting there. What is his master?"

"Mr. Ernest Archdale is an officer, and very often ill, and very kind to me."

"Ernest Archdale? Where did you see him?"

"At Sir Marcus Combermere's—and Mrs. Archdale was there too. We live very near them, in Mrs. Keith's lodgings."

The old lady uttered an exclamation which Emily did not understand, and rang the bell hastily. On the appearance of a maid, she ordered a tray of refreshments from the supper-room to be brought, and also that the servant who attended on Miss Stormount should be sent to her directly.

"And tell your mistress that I shall be glad to speak to her as soon as she is at leisure."

The maid stared at Emily, but evidently knew that the old lady was not to be disobeyed, for she hurried away immediately. Paul, and the tray, and her mistress appeared almost simultaneously. The latter, somewhat startled by the unexpected summons, was begin-

ning to ask anxiously if dear Mrs. Raymond felt unwell, but Mrs. Raymond's smile at once relieved her of that anxiety.

"You have given us a charming evening, full of pretty surprises, my dear Fanny, but you do not know, perhaps, that your house is haunted by fairies, and that Snowdrop, looking for her seven brothers, has been caught asleep in an old woman's fur cloak. Here is a dear, tired child for whom I have bespoken some supper, before taking her home with me. She is a friend of my daughter's, and so I have the first right in her, though I accept your hospitality so far."

The quick ear of Paul had caught the words, "my daughter," and the remembrance of a photograph in his master's dressing-case explained the matter at once. He was ready with answers to the questions put to him, as to his position in Ernest's service and the state of his health; but with regard to Miss Stormount he was more reserved. The young lady had got separated from her friends, and was put into the wrong train, he said, and he had made bold to take what care of her he could, as he knew his master would wish him to do. He had meant to take her to the nearest inn for the night, and their coming into the house had been to avoid an accident.

"I am sure my friend Mrs. Donne is very glad you came in; this dear child is very young to be travelling at night in this way. As soon as she has finished her supper, if you will be good enough to ask for Mrs. Raymond's carriage, I will take you all home with me; and as your master is my dear grandson, I will answer for his giving leave."

"Pray go and get some supper yourself," said Mrs. Donne, who was coaxing Emily, and petting Coco, with a cordiality that testified to her regard for her old friend's wishes; and Paul, seeing both his charges so well provided for, was not at all sorry to obey. Though maintaining his discreet reserve, he contrived to throw out hints, which made a due impression on the servants who heard them; and the report that a young heiress had been nearly run over, and had taken shelter at Mrs. Donne's, spread, as reports do, with wonderful rapidity, causing a sensation of curiosity and interest which the hostess had some difficulty in satisfying. All she knew was that the child had a striking countenance, and looked much too delicate to be travelling by night. It was a mysterious story altogether, but her dear old friend had taken it all into her own hands, and she would be sure to do what was best. They would hear more, no doubt, when the poor child was sufficiently rested to explain.

That the little wanderer needed rest, and must not be harassed with questions, was but too plain to the benevolent old lady who had carried her off. She put her arm round her in the carriage, and let her weary head lie on her shoulder; while Coco, after a little hesitation, took up his place on her lap, finding the fur cloak as much to his taste as his young mistress had done. Fortunately, they had not far to go.

Mrs. Raymond lived in what could truly be called a cottage, for

it was as small as a lady's house could well be, her carriage being only a hired fly, and her establishment limited to one maid. A maid of marvellous energy and cleverness, never so happy as when doing the work of four, and knowing that her two hands were worth their eight.

To this invaluable retainer Mrs. Raymond addressed herself as soon as she appeared at the door.

"Come here, Bennet; I have a present for you."

Paul opened the carriage door, and Bennet stepped out smiling, quite ready to be agreeably surprised.

"Here is a wandering princess come to the old fairy's hut in the woods, Bennet, and she is to be put into a warm bed and dream of fairyland till morning. And here is the identical dog that came out of the nutshell, and *he* is to be put to bed too, in her room; and there is one of her six wonderful servants, who is also to be made much of, though which of them he will turn out to be I cannot say. They all three came off the Christmas-tree on purpose for us, so we must prize them accordingly."

Bennet knew her lady well enough to accept all this as a most charming increase of property, congratulated her on being so fortunate, and helped out Emily and Coco with most respectful looks of welcome. The intelligence that the young lady had no luggage, but was to be provided with what was necessary, produced only a "Certainly, ma'am;" and Paul was requested to follow as readily as if there had been a servants' hall in which to entertain him, instead of the tiny kitchen, opposite the parlour, where she had been getting up her mistress's lace and cambric, by way of passing the evening.

"You will find a fire there," she said cheerfully, "only please excuse the table being covered. I will come and clear it directly, and see about your bed. You won't mind roughing it for one night, I daresay."

If this were roughing it, Paul wondered what smoothness would be. Certainly, there was no roughness for Emily, who was allowed to look about her in the exquisite little parlour; which was more like an emporium of fine arts, than an ordinary place to live in, with its carved wood and delicate china, choice pictures, and filigree ornaments of the good old workmen, who wrought as artists, not as traders. The paper, the curtains, the chintz, were all in harmony, and in the most perfect taste; and a delicate odour pervaded the atmosphere, which might have been from freshly plucked roses, but was really the product of the distiller's cunning. A small clear fire burned in the grate, and Mrs. Raymond's easy-chair and work-basket were ready on one side. Before anything could be suggested, a tempting seat had been placed near it for the stranger, and Coco was invited to the snowy hearthrug, which looked as if no coals or smoke ever came near it, and on which he curled himself as if it was no more than his due. A small, shaded lamp was lighted, and then Bennet

vanished to make the needful preparations elsewhere, for they owned no such luxury as a spare room.

Mrs. Raymond threw off her cloak, sat down in her arm-chair, and drew Emily into the seat beside her. "Well, little Snowdrop," she said, seeing the child's earnest eyes fixed upon her face, "what do you think of the old fairy's hut?"

"It is very pretty, though it is so small," said Emily, "and you are very kind. Everybody is kind in England."

"Indeed? I have found it otherwise, Snowdrop: though kindness has not been wanting, either. But small as the hut is, there is always room for a friend; fairies take care of that, as you will find."

"Fairies are not real," said Emily, shaking her head; "they are not like spirits."

"What do you know about spirits, little maiden? You are almost a sprite yourself, appearing in people's rooms at night when they do not expect you."

"Oh, I hope not. Spirits are unkind and cruel; they hate dogs and birds. I never had a dog to pet, till I went away from home, because the spirits did not like them."

Mrs. Raymond's fingers stole along the child's wrist to feel her pulse.

"She is not feverish," she thought, "or I should fancy she was light-headed. No, her manner is too natural for any delusion. There is some strange story connected with this, and she may be easier if she tells me all."

So, carefully suppressing any signs of surprise, she encouraged her young guest to be communicative: and Emily, in her quiet, matter-of-fact style of narrative, told a great deal without intending, or knowing it. She gave her little history, as we have already traced it; but she added some details of what had gone before which deeply moved her listener. When Emily was asleep in the bed which Bennet had contrived for her in her own room, Mrs. Raymond confided to her attendant the story she had just heard; anxious to see what she thought of it. Bennet nodded her head in evident satisfaction. The boy had told just the same tale, and how he had followed to save her from her step-father's hands; and he had almost tears in his eyes when he said he would have followed them through fire and water sooner than not at all, only it would soon have been difficult, for his money was just out. "And I made bold, ma'am, knowing you would wish it, to hand him over some, that he may telegraph to his master, or the lady, the first thing in the morning," added Bennet. "I told him I did not think you would approve of the young lady going off with him by the early train, and that no doubt the lady who has charge of Miss Stormount would come and fetch her."

"You are right, Bennet, as you generally are. We shall not give up our wanderer to any but the lawful hands. By the way, what is

your opinion of this lad whom the dear child seems to trust so completely? Is he trustworthy, or not?"

"Well, ma'am, I asked that question of myself just now, and I could not help thinking that if he had not been Mr. Ernest would not have taken to him, as he seems to have done."

"Ah, Bennet, Mr. Ernest can do no wrong, and make no mistakes, in your opinion."

"Not quite that, ma'am. I have known him make mistakes, and may know him make more; but he is one that you couldn't impose on twice, and if he trusts this lad, I think I should."

Paul was commissioned to send the telegram in the morning, and went out. His breakfast waited long for his return, but waited in vain.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE TRAIL.

THE shock of the sudden news—the more sudden, that there had been mention of improvement in the last accounts—that Mrs. Dangerfield was gone, and that her guardianship had begun at the moment when her charge was missing, seemed powerfully to affect Adela Granard's nerves, already sufficiently tried by recent suffering. The agony of self-reproach for carelessness, and the dread of what it might lead to, could only be allayed by hastening in pursuit; and her friends, though anxious on her own account, sympathised too much not to speed her on her way. Nothing would induce Sir Marcus Combermere to let her go without him; and a hint to his daughter made her dutifully suppress all objection. His carriage, servants, purse, and time were all at her disposal: moreover, he had a duty to perform to his little patient, who had thus been spirited away from his care. Ernest Archdale's offer to accompany them was at first peremptorily rejected; but after a private conference on the subject, Sir Marcus changed his mind, and consented that he should go, at any rate, as far as they could drive, and return in the carriage.

"I will see he does nothing foolish," he said to Mrs. Archdale, who smiled acquiescence, but did not feel at all sure that he was not promising more than he could perform. Cecilia, standing near, expressed nothing but sympathy with Miss Granard, and resentment on Emily's behalf. Sympathy was, indeed, the general sentiment. Mr. Bourne volunteered to look after the ladies in his host's absence; and forgot to be affronted because he went at all. The Archdeacon, finding Sir Marcus bent on going, said nothing about his own plans. He left them to arrange theirs while he strode home to pack his bag and get ready for the next up-train. With all this, it seemed that Emily's recovery must be a matter of course. As soon as the carriage, with Charles on the box beside the coachman, drove from the door, those left gave audible utterance to their doubts and fears.

"He has got too good a start, that Professor man ; they'll never catch him," said Mr. Bourne, gloomily : "but it's no use saying so."

"Then why do you say it?" thought Kate, though she kept the angry words back, for it would not do to quarrel now her father was gone. "If I could have foreseen being left like this by papa, what should I have done?—and yet I cannot grudge him to Adela. Oh dear, how ill she looked ! I wish they were all safe home again !"

Had she read her father's thoughts, she would have seen he was wishing the same thing : but, as the journey must be taken, his chief care was to make it as easy as possible for his two companions. Adela made him uneasy. He could see how strenuous were the efforts she made to keep herself calm, while her head was throbbing, and her cheeks were burning ; every fibre of her frame seemed ready to quiver. To beguile the way, and divert her thoughts, if possible, he drew Archdale into conversation ; and the latter, discerning the motive, talked of everything that he hoped would interest her, and succeeded, sometimes, in making her forget. It was not much that either could do in the way of kindness, but all in their power they did, and she felt it to her heart's core.

Whether his mother was right, and he was doing a foolish thing in spite of Sir Marcus's promise, is not for us to decide ; but of this we may be assured, that all his sympathy, all his indignation, all his fear for the innocent cause of her anxiety, did not prevent the invalid lieutenant from a sense of enjoyment which he had not known for many a day. To sit opposite to one so lovely and interesting as Adela Granard, sharing her troubles, helping her through her difficulties, knowing himself to be of use, and a support instead of an incumbrance, was a sensation sweet enough to have warned him of its danger, had he thought of himself at all. Unselfish by nature, it was a positive relief to lay aside the invalid, and be occupied for other people. Though never a moment without pain or discomfort, he hid both with gallant endeavour ; and, indeed, was scarcely sensible of either in the presence of Adela.

Sir Marcus, whose keen eye nothing escaped, encouraged him in his pretence of being free from pain ; even looked as if he believed it.

"Let him alone, my dear," he said, when Ernest had insisted on alighting at an inn, to make enquiries, which Adela thought Charles could have made with less risk, "nothing is so wholesome for him, poor fellow, as fancying he is useful. I brought him as much for his own sake as ours ; anything is good that gives him a motive for exertion."

Adela thought that this was holding his services rather cheap, but did not say so. He came back, shaking his head with an air of disappointment. She was beginning to thank him, when a helper in a fur cap came up to the carriage, and, with a rough kind of salute, asked, in the broad dialect of those parts, if one of the gen-

tleman was Mr. Archdale. Yes—here he was; what news? As to news, the helper could say nothing; only he had a bit of a note here, to hand to him, and the young chap said he was to have a shilling for it.

"Penny post would be an improvement here, Archdale, wouldn't it?" said Sir Marcus, as Ernest, with evident triumph, paid the money; receiving, in return, a dirty wisp of paper, none the fresher for having been kept, for safety, in the fur cap of the messenger.

"It's all right, Sir Marcus," he replied, after puzzling over this for some minutes. "They passed this way by the coach, and he has seen the little lady, and she seems quite quiet, hugging Coco."

"Coco will be her best friend, next to Paul himself, I have a notion. Anyhow, it was a good thought of the lad's to write; it shows he is in earnest."

Adela's eyes shone with thankfulness. In fact, the whole party were relieved of a secret dread, lest terror and surprise should have brought on one of poor Emily's nervous attacks. Now that she must soon know a friend was at hand, there was every hope she would hold out till they could reach her.

Sir Marcus had Bradshaw at his fingers' ends, and was not long in discovering that it was almost impossible for them, in the state of the roads, to reach the town in time for the seven o'clock up-train; by which train he expected the Professor meant to reach London. However, he had additional horses put to the carriage, and did all in his power to achieve the impossible—so that Adela was supported by the hope of being in time till they reached the inn where the coach put up. Here, on enquiry, they learned that no gentleman and child had entered the premises. After some little delay, it was found they had driven to the Royal Hotel. Thither they went accordingly, and Ernest picked up another cypher, confirming the Baronet's opinion. The Professor had ordered a fly for the station, to catch the 7 p.m. train.

It was now long past that hour, and Sir Marcus needed but one look at his fair companion to decide him on taking prompt measures.

"We can do nothing more for an hour or two," he said, "so I see no reason why we should starve. Archdale, my good fellow, order something as soon as you can; soup, and a cutlet, and a bottle of sherry, and some tea—then we shall please all tastes; and you, Miss Granard, be so good as to sit down by the fire, and rest yourself till dinner is ready. If you can get a little nap, all the better."

He knew well enough that sleep was to her simply impossible, while her temples beat like hammers, and her feet were cold as ice. To keep her quiet was his real object, while he took Charles aside for a confidential explanation.

"Your young lady, my good fellow, is done up. She ought not to go a step further."

"I was just thinking so myself, Sir Marcus."

"She has been stunned by the suddenness of the whole thing, you see, telegram and all. She will be quite ill if she goes on."

"It's no wonder to me, Sir Marcus, begging your pardon—knowing, as I know, all she went through. I've been afraid some mischief would come of it, all along."

"We'll stop the mischief, if we can. Look here, Charles. If she can get a good long sleep, she will wake up much better. I mean her to stay here to-night and take something I shall prescribe; and the people of the house are respectable and intelligent, and will take care to obey my orders. You must remain too, to keep watch over her; and if she sleeps till the middle of to-morrow, all the better. Mr. Archdale will be at hand, and I shall telegraph to him as soon as I have any news of Miss Emily. I hope to stop them at Dover by going up to-night by the eleven train."

"You must go, then, Sir Marcus?" said Charles, ruefully. For, in his opinion, Adela was of more consequence than her ward.

"Why, you don't think your young lady would sleep much to-night, if no one went after the child, do you?—and of the four of us, I am the only one that can go. I shall give Mr. Archdale instructions what to do: and you must look after him, and see he has a good fire, for it has been rather a risk his coming at all."

Charles bowed, smiling a little to himself; for he had his own opinion as to the secret of Ernest's sudden energy. He promised the young gentleman should want nothing that he could do for him; and Sir Marcus, having settled this point, went to prepare Adela for what he knew would be a trial—the necessity of being left behind.

He waited till the meal had been served, and he had seen her futile attempts to partake of it. When the cloth was removed, and she began to look at her watch, as if she thought it was time to dress for the journey, he drew his chair by the side of hers, and took her by the hand.

"You are not going any further to-night, my dear. Everything is arranged, and I undertake it all. You are ill, and quite unable to do anything but just obey me as your doctor, and trust me as your friend."

He had prepared himself for remonstrance, but perceived that his decision was an immense relief. For the last hour Adela had been thinking of the noise of the train, and how she should ever bear it. Her powers of exertion had so completely collapsed, that sorrow and anxiety and self-reproach, the three goads which had harassed her during the tedious drive, had lost their poignancy; pain and oppression had obtained such complete mastery. She yielded without a struggle, and scarcely seemed to understand what the others were arranging. To lay her head on a pillow, and hear nothing, was all she could wish for, or think about.

And thanks to her doctor's prescription, she did at last obtain some sleep, though not of a refreshing kind. It was a night of continual

struggle with fearful dreams; in which, as was only natural, Emily bore her part, and Emily's enemies, the spirits. She woke at last, repeating in her anguish, "More with us than with them"—and found it was morning, and a civil chambermaid coming in with a welcome cup of tea. After drinking it she fell asleep again, and did not wake till so late in the day, that a shaded lamp was burning on the table, by which the shadow of a seated figure was thrown on the opposite wall. As she turned to look at it, the figure rose, and a soft, light hand was laid on her temples; such a touch as she had not felt since she lost her mother. A sweet, low voice, with an accent in it that reminded her of foreign friends, asked if she would like something to drink; and a cup was offered to her lips, pleasant and refreshing both to smell and taste. She drank, and the same voice spoke to someone else in the room, observing that she would soon feel better.

She did feel better already: and, recollecting why she was there, and what had happened before, roused herself to look at her watch, and ask if there were any news.

"Yes, my dear," said the sweet voice, "the best of news. Your child is safe, only waiting till you are well enough to see her; and an old woman has come to see that you are taken care of yourself, until you are able to take care of other people."

"Emily is here? Oh, thank God for His mercy! Did Sir Marcus find her? Is he come back?"

"Nobody found her but me; and I found her asleep on my fur cloak, like a little princess in the fairy tales. Now you are too polite to ask who I am, so I must introduce myself as Ernest's granny. You know my daughter, Mrs. Archdale, and I know you by her letters; and I owe the spirits and the conjurors a good turn for helping us to become acquainted."

There was no resisting the winning manner. Though still confused and wandering, Adela felt a strange pleasure mingle with her pain, and putting the delicate hand to her lips, endeavoured to express her thanks. She had been dreaming that she had no friends left—everyone she loved or knew was gone, and her own fault had driven them away. It was, indeed, a glad awakening to find her carelessness repaired, and another kind friend come to her help.

"But my poor child—I must see her; I have to break sad news. Has Mr. Archdale told you her history?"

"I know some of it, my dear, and it has made my old blood boil, I can tell you, as if I were five-and-twenty. But I cannot help thinking it will be safer to keep the sorrowful news till you are at home. She has been so startled and shaken, poor little thing, that she is hardly in a state to bear a blow. We will prepare her for it by degrees; and while I go down to her now, suppose you dream that Bennet is your maid, and let her do for you as she does for me?"

It would be worth while to dream oftener, if dreams in general had

the comfortable reality about them which Bennet's presence implied. The luxury of such an attendant was one that Adela Granard had not enjoyed for many a long day; if, indeed, she had ever met with one so deft of hand, and so clever in perceiving just what to do and what to leave undone. While assisting the young lady to dress, she quietly told her all she wanted to know; how Miss Stormount had been discovered at Mrs. Donne's, and how the page, Paul, had set off in the morning to telegraph of her safety, and had not been seen since. How Mr. Ernest (as she always called him) found out where she was, Bennet was not quite clear. It was explained to Adela afterwards.

The story of the gentleman and the child, and all the questions asked about them, had, of course, spread through the town; and, perhaps, a rumour may have been afloat that any news about them would be rewarded. At any rate, Ernest received a visit in the morning from the driver of the fly that conveyed the Professor to the station, avowedly to restore a handkerchief that the young lady had dropped, but with the purpose also of informing him that the fare had not gone by the seven up-train at all; he had driven them to the Midland, "t'other side of the town." As this was important information, it met with due reward, and after consulting Charles, the young officer decided to follow the indicated route. He caught a train that changed for London where the evening one had done, and on making enquiry there, heard a strange tale—how a gentleman had met with an accident, and got separated from his daughter, and went on, thinking she was in another carriage; but finding she had been left behind, had telegraphed that she was to wait for his return. The gentleman had come back that morning to fetch her, but no one knew where she was, nor had she been seen since the night before, and the poor father was in a terrible taking. It was supposed he had gone to a magistrate's, to get help from the police.

Finding no message from Paul, and having time to spare, Ernest took the opportunity of surprising his grandmother with a visit, little expecting the surprise that awaited him at her house. Bennet did not think it necessary to explain how strongly her mistress's feelings were wrought upon by the glowing description the young gentleman gave of Miss Stormount's guardian—but Mrs. Raymond had decided to bring the child back to Miss Granard herself, rather than send her alone with Mr. Archdale; and it was evident, by her own showing, that Bennet had been charmed to have to pack and arrange against time, and to find plenty to do for them all as soon as she arrived. At the risk of making mortal enemies in the Royal Hotel, she had tidied the rooms, and re-modelled the fires, and prepared all sorts of things over a spirit lamp, which she refused to trust to any of the kitchen officials; and only regretted that she could not see personally to the cooking of the dinner, as she was sure nobody knew exactly what her mistress liked but herself.

Adela was scarcely dressed, when Emily came to her door, petitioning for admission; and directly she saw her, the young guardian felt Mrs. Raymond's advice was judicious. Folding her arms round the child, and feeling how her slight frame quivered with agitation, she silently vowed that come what might, if only power were given, her first duty on earth would be to that persecuted orphan. To make her happy, to bring her up in the fear of God, to teach her the right use of the means put into her hands, to deliver her brain and nerves from the terrors which had been so cruelly excited—this, with Heaven's help, should be the work of her life, so long as it was needed; and as she pressed her lips on Emily's forehead to seal the vow, her tears dropped on her face.

"Are you crying?" asked Emily, anxiously. "Do you think mamma will be sorry I did not go?"

"No, dear; it was her wish that you should be with me."

"Will he be unkind to her about it?"

"Our Father in Heaven will take care of her, Emily. He keeps watch over her, as He does over us. We have only to trust Him, and nothing can make us afraid."

It was the simple truth she had from the first endeavoured to stamp on the excited brain, and which had already proved so efficacious. Emily was silent for some minutes, revolving some point in her mind, which at last found utterance in a question. "Will He take care of Paul, too?"

"If Paul trusts in Him, we know He will."

"But Paul says he knows nothing about it; that no one ever taught him. And now he is lost, too, and nobody is going to look for him."

"Yes, indeed, my Snowdrop," said Mrs. Raymond, who had followed her, "we all mean to look for Paul; and if he has never been taught that his Father knows how to take care of him, he will learn it. I am an old woman now, my dear, but I was much younger than either Paul or you when I knew what it was to have no home, and to lose what seemed to be my only friend."

"Oh, tell me all about it—tell me your story!" said Emily, eagerly. But the old lady shook her head.

"Some day, when Miss Granard brings you to pay me a visit, as I hope she will, you shall hear my adventures, as far as they will interest you. And meanwhile, do not forget that you have seen an instance of the wonderful way in which our Father takes care of us—for here I am to tell the tale, and your troubles are nothing to mine."

She had done good service by saying this, for it took Emily completely out of herself: and, her imagination being set to work, she thought of little else all the evening but what Mrs. Raymond's adventures could have been; hoping that the talked-of visit would be paid before very long.

There was another whose eyes brightened when such a scheme was

talked of. Ernest had always been his grandmother's favourite, and to her indulgence he would sometimes confide matters that he shrank from discussing with his mother. She knew all about Cairngorm, and Miss Wilmot, and was now only waiting for him to begin, to throw herself heartily into the whole concern. But finding him silent, she took the opportunity, when they were alone for a few minutes, to ask how his affairs were progressing.

"I hear you met accidentally—is there anything for me to hear?"

He looked up with a smile. "Accidentally, indeed. That snow-drift was a blessed invention. Is she not lovely, granny?"

The old lady raised her eyebrows; she knew now where she was.

"It is no longer Rosalind, then, my gentle Montague? I never saw the other, but I cannot wonder if you admire so fair a creature as this. How long have you known her?"

"If we measure by time, granny, I am afraid it will seem a little while; but I feel as if I had known her half my life. At least, as if the rest were of very little account."

"Has it gone so far as this, my poor boy? And what does *she* feel, or think?"

"Dear granny, how should I know? I have said and done nothing to raise the question. How can I? You see what I am; and in how unfit a state to win anyone——"

"You have yet to learn that we women are sometimes as much won by weakness and suffering, as by gallantry and strength?"

"Oh, I know you are ministering angels—none better; but a man must feel he has something to offer besides his own discomforts; and I have very little more. Granny, what will you say to my leaving the army for a house of business?"

She was shocked; he saw that. But she would not grieve him.

"Does your mother approve, my child?" she said with a sigh.

"Dear mother winces, as you do; but necessity admits no sentiment. I must leave my sword with you till I can claim it again, like the old marquis you used to make me read about."

"And there is no other course for you? Nothing but a desk and a ledger?"

"Nothing; unless I could find the lost dowry, granny." He said this to make her smile; but the hand that was stroking his hair, stopped short, and pressed his head with sudden vehemence.

"Ernest, that dream returned to me last night! Often as you have laughed at the old woman's story, the day will yet come—I feel it—when you will acknowledge it was all true. Oh, how I have prayed that I might see it before I die! But if I never do, you will. All will be yours, all—to win Juliet, or Rosalind, whichever of them may then be the ascendant star."

"You dearest of women! you would give away all that you have, as well as all you dream about. I will be bound you saw the dowry in a silver casket, or steel-clamped box, brimming over with gold

pieces and pearls, and you said to yourself, 'Now this time I know I am awake,' and then you awoke, and, behold, it was a dream."

"As others have done before me," said Mrs. Raymond, passing from the subject. It agitated her more than her grandson supposed.

Sir Marcus was expected to return by a late train, and Bennet tried very hard to make everybody go to bed, and leave her and Charles (whom she admitted to have some common sense) to see that all was comfortable for him. But as Ernest persisted in sitting up, she could only expend her goodwill upon the young ladies and Coco, whose affections would have been in danger had he been a man, instead of a dog. The gentle attentions of the old lady, to whom she was now a peculiar object of interest, were no less soothing to Adela; and she was conscious of an exquisite pleasure in seeing that she found favour in the eyes of one so dear to Ernest. With his mother, she had felt constraint and doubt; but Emily's fairy hostess had a face and manner that could not deceive; and the magic of her caressing touch seemed for the moment to lull that gnawing at the heart, which only the orphan knows. The kind old lady could not sleep till she had seen both wanderers in bed, and exacted a renewal of the promise that they would come and see her some day, and hear the old woman's story.

"And if, when you do, you can find me a conjuror who can solve my riddle, all I can say is, I shall be happy to believe in him."

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNKNOWN CORRESPONDENTS.

SIR MARCUS was back. The last day of the holidays had come; and Kate Combermere went about her household duties with a cloud on her spirits, as meekly as if she were going to school herself—as perhaps she was. The last two days, since the other guests had departed, had been so happy in the enjoyment of Lewis's companionship, so free from cares and interruptions, that it was all the harder to face the morrow's blank, and think how long it would be till Easter. Lewis himself was more silent than usual, and lounged in and out of the deserted rooms, with his hands in his pockets, as if he could settle nowhere. At last he could bear it no longer, and summoned Kate to come out for a walk, "while it was fine."

It had rained all night, and was not exactly fine then; the mists were lying low in the valleys, and the country looked, as Lewis disrespectfully remarked, like Dickens's benevolent patriarch, after his hair was cut short. But Kate would have done anything to please him; and Dandie, who had been much discomfited by symptoms of packing, to which he had a strong aversion, woke up from a dissatisfied slumber into somewhat obtrusive activity, and seconded the motion with a round of applause. Umbrellas and proof-armour being hastily assumed, the friends started for their last walk, choosing

the high road because they had no choice—it was the only one passable.

"Well, Kate," was Lewis's first remark, when they had gone some little way in silence, "if all your visitors were as sorry to go as I am, you are in for a voluminous correspondence. I have been studying my letter of thanks half the morning; and, as Mr. Collins would say, you may expect it in a day or two."

"So long as you do write, I'll forgive you the thanks. I had quite enough with good Mrs. Bourne's."

"Dear kind soul! One had need to be thoroughly sweet-tempered to live with her."

"One had need to be sweet-tempered anywhere, but one isn't: judging by those around her."

"Oh, I do not defend old Bourne. I have been wondering how he and Archdale will hit it off, when it comes to a difference of opinion."

"It would be difficult to quarrel with Ernest."

"So difficult, that I have given it up: though I have been within an ace of trying."

"Why, what has he done?"

"Done? That is the very thing. Where any man in his senses would do a great deal, he does nothing. I never saw a fellow so blind to his own opportunities."

"He has not been fit to work before, remember. I think the move he has made is very much to his credit, for I am sure it went against him, poor fellow."

"Oh, you pity him, do you? Well, it may be a nuisance to work under old Bourne, but there might be compensation there, if he chose to have it."

"It will be compensation, if he adds to his mother's income."

"You mercenary being, is that all you think of? Can anybody, gifted with the eyesight of an owl in the daytime, help seeing, when those two are together, what one of them is throwing away?"

"He and his mother, do you mean?" asked Kate, knowing perfectly well that he meant nothing of the kind.

"His mother? nonsense. I mean that poor, sweet girl who evidently worships him: and whom, as far as I can see, he does not treat as she deserves?"

"Perhaps I am short-sighted, but as far as I can see, I really think he does. You have taken the lead in gossiping about our neighbours, recollect. What a state this road is in!"

"It is not gossip, it is plain fact," said Lewis, striding ankle deep through water, without being the least aware of it. "He has won her regard, no matter whether he meant it or not; and now he chooses to be coldly civil, and hug his own offended dignity on account of some thoughtlessness on her part, such as any pretty girl might be guilty of, under circumstances. I suppose he never knew the facts; and

it is just one of those cases where people may be miserable all their lives, just for want of an explanation."

"But what is to hinder an explanation, if there can be one?"

"Just put yourself in her place, Kate. Not as you actually are, always sensible and right-judging——"

"I would curtsy, sir, but for the puddles," interrupted Kate.

"But as she was then; ignorant of the world, flattered, and carried away with high spirits and novelty. She does a thing she is sorry for—it was not a crime, when all is said and done—but of course it was not pleasant for him to hear she had been seen in his rival's four-in-hand, while he was laid up with his fall. Now, if he knew the whole story—how unhappy she was all the time, though she did not know how much he was hurt—how she had to hide her misery from the curious eyes round her, for fear of their remarks, and was ashamed to stand out, because she felt it all so much—if he knew all this, which it is impossible for her to tell him, do you suppose it would not all come right between them directly? He must be much more stiff-necked than I think him, if he stood on his dignity afterwards."

"How came you to know all this, Lewis?"

"Now then, what are the gossips going to say about that? She is one of those innocent, open-hearted creatures that expand to kindness as flowers to the sun; and when I was clumsy enough to say that I understood and was sorry for her, instead of being affronted, as some girls would have been, and spiting me for my awkwardness, she took me into her confidence in the most engaging way—and when she had relieved her heart, I could only offer to help her, if possible. I declare, she looked upon me at the time as she might look upon the Archdeacon: whom, by the way, she does not at all admire. Was there any harm in all that?"

"None in the world. Are you not betraying her confidence by telling me?"

"I should be, if I had not assured her that you would be her best adviser. She said she only wished you knew all, but she was a little afraid of you."

Miss Combermere only smiled. She asked how he proposed to be of any use in so delicate a matter.

"Well, I tried it on with Archdale before he went; but he was so taken up with his journeys, and his change of professions, and the mystery of his Goblin Page, in whom I simply do not believe, that there was no making him attend. Perhaps he guessed what I wanted, and (very naturally) wished me to mind my own business. However, I have not done with him. He will have to settle in London, and I shall get an exeat, like the boys, and run up some Saturday till Monday."

"I thought you never liked to do that," said Kate, rather dismayed by the suggestion.

"I do not, as a rule. When I mentioned it, Miss Wilmot brightened up so much, I could not be so ungracious as not say I would call at Mr. Bourne's. She reminded me of it as she said good-bye."

"Her spirits did not seem to require much cheering. Perhaps it was all your doing that she laughed and chattered the whole evening."

"You do not know how low she was that day the child was stolen, and we were all in an uproar. Archdale, it seems, hardly noticed her at all, though he knew how she had been frightened; and went off in the carriage without a word or a look to comfort her. So I proposed starting for a good walk among the hills; we had talked of it before, and it did her all the good in the world. You saw how much better she was: and so I repeated the remedy every day."

Kate had seen, indeed, that Cecilia made a point of showing indifference about Ernest, both during his absence and after his return; her pleasant looks and attentive ears being reserved for Lewis. She felt perplexed, and saddened, but durst not ask herself why.

"Tell me what you think, Kate," he went on, after a pause. "Surely one ought not to see so sweet a life made wretched for want of a few friendly words?"

"If I thought a few friendly words would make them both happy, I should be as ready to speak them as you are; but, my dear fellow-gossip (you began it, remember), before you let your benevolence run away with you, had you not better be certain that it is not too late? Are you sure our friend Ernest has any heart left to give?"

"If he has not—but I don't believe it. I know of whom you are thinking: but it no more follows from his being ready to help her about the child, than from my fishing her out of the snow. I only wonder your gossiping propensity has not fastened upon me!"

His laugh did her good; for, at any rate, there was no consciousness in it, and she was wise enough not to make any attempt at warning him of danger. The conversation turned on other subjects, and she tried to forget her uneasiness: or, at least, to think it unfounded.

Breakfast, taken early the next morning, was over when the letters arrived. Lewis Frankland's eyes at once detected a delicate handwriting he had learned to distinguish, among a pile that fell to Kate's share. Sir Marcus took his from the room.

"Mr. Collins has kept his word, I am sure," he said. "There must be a letter of thanks among all these. Do let me hear one."

She had intended reserving them till he was gone, as only one precious quarter of an hour remained; but, yielding to his wish, she opened Miss Wilmot's, and read it aloud.

"MY DEAR MISS COMBERMERE,—I cannot allow anyone else to speak for me, not even Mrs. Bourne, who can speak so well for everybody; and though she will have told you all that is worth

your knowing, I must steal a few minutes of that time which is so largely drawn upon, to assure you I shall never forget all the kindness shown to me in your delightful house. I shall often and often long to be back again in the warm, bright rooms, watching the snow, and hearing the wind, remembering how equal your resources were to every emergency, and that, the rougher matters looked with out, the smoother they would be within. Our journey was painfully devoid of incident; Miss Medlicott was nearly left behind at the refreshment station; and Mr. Bourne, for full twenty minutes, believed he had lost the tickets; both proving false alarms. There was no snowdrift to stop us at hospitable gates, and no gallant deliverer to dig us out if there had been. I am afraid Mr. Frankland will have a great deal to answer for, as I have become slightly insane on the subject of hills, and have invested in a map of London that I may know where to find them. At present I am divided between the Holborn and Notting ranges, as a preparation for the Alpine heights of Primrose and Hampstead. Any hints about guides, outfit, and distances, will be gratefully acknowledged."

"That is all meant for you, Lewis, so you will have to answer it. The rest is a pretty little speech for my father; but he must read it afterwards, or you will miss your train."

"Give it to me; I will read it to him on the way," said Lewis, "it will amuse me through my dull journey. You shall have it again, if you want it."

And, true to his word, he returned it in a couple of days, with a facetious parody of an Alpine Club paper, describing an imaginary ascent of Holborn Hill, with full instructions to the uninitiated, which Kate laughed over first, and about which she very nearly cried when she forwarded it to Cecilia Wilmot.

"Well, my love," said Sir Marcus, thinking how quiet the house was after their large party, "you managed to keep them from quarrelling, you see, after all."

She smiled, because he was watching her; and said he was always right, and she should never be anxious on that score again.

"But oh!" she thought, when she could do so freely, "they might all have quarrelled and welcome, sooner than it should have come to this."

Her best resource at this time was her intercourse with Keith's lodgings, to which Miss Granard had got back. Between her own and Emily's affairs, Adela had more business letters to read and write than she could well have got through, without the help of Comber Court. Sir Marcus was always at her service, and the most difficult parts of the correspondence were generally accomplished in his study; while it became so natural for Kate to make her friend's dwelling the object of her constitutional walk, that Dandie was aggrieved when she attempted to go anywhere else.

The interest of Dandie's visits, the little bustle that ensued of

persuading Coco to go into retirement, that his feelings might not be lacerated by seeing his little mistress devote herself to another—the delight of being entreated for biscuit with all the eloquence of begging paw and wooing tail—were of more value to Emily than Dandie knew. Her state was far from satisfactory, though Sir Marcus was hopeful for the future, and encouraged patience and ingenuity in working out the cure. She had borne the revelation of her mother's death better than was expected, receiving with docility all the consolations her friends could suggest, and obeying every word or look of Adela's, with an eagerness that showed how she dwelt upon the last injunction she had heard from that mother's lips. But her nights were sometimes terrible. Many an hour did her guardian hear the church clock strike, while she sat by the poor child's bed, holding her hand as she lay awake, or watching for one of those starts from harrowing dreams, which were worse than sleeplessness. Adela's beauty began to look a little worn.

"You will have to keep a nurse and a secretary, if this goes on," said Miss Combermere, when she found her friend, after one of these vigils, sitting with her head on her hand, and a pile of letters at her elbow. "I asked Charles if you were very busy, and he looked 'volumes,' as the people say—binding, advertisements, and all; and no wonder. Where is Emily?"

"The Archdeacon has taken her out for a walk. He only returned yesterday, and I have had a lecture already about exercise and occupation."

"I feel more inclined to lecture upon rest and recreation. What is the last worry? You were brooding over one when I came in?"

"I was thinking about Paul Rocket; wishing we could hear something of him. His disappearance has begun to distress Emily strangely. Instead of those dreams about her poor mother calling for help, she is haunted now by visions of Paul's being persecuted by the spirits, and prevented from coming back. You look as if you had something to tell."

"I have only this anonymous letter Ernest Archdale has sent us; a proof, in itself, that we are all pretty strictly watched. Like all such documents, the handwriting is detestable. There it is for you."

The letter was enclosed in an envelope, addressed to Sir Marcus, in a bold, manly hand, on which Adela's eye dwelt with interest. "Oh!" said Kate, good-humouredly, "I did not mean Mr. Archdale's writing; you will find his correspondent's much less pleasant to decipher."

It was, indeed, an ill-spelt, ill-worded scrawl, to the effect that no further trouble need be taken about Paul Rocket, as he had deserved so well of his employers in his recent mission, that they had promoted him to a better situation, and higher wages. The faults of spelling, like the irregular characters, were evidently assumed; the signature

was with difficulty made out to be "One who knows ;" and there was no date, or address. The postmark was London.

"My father thinks," said Kate, "that this is as likely as not to be only a blind, intended to set us against the lad. But it makes one anxious on his account, poor fellow. What makes you look so hard at the writing?"

"I want to compare it with another anonymous letter, which I received this morning," replied Adela.

"Another! This looks like a deliberate plan of annoyance."

"It means more than that, I am afraid," sighed Miss Granard.

"Listen:—

"The guardian of Miss Emily Stormount is recommended to be careful how she enters into the responsibilities of a property on which there may be serious claims. Circumstances known only to the present writer, but deserving earnest consideration, might make Miss Granard's position anything but desirable. Should further elucidation be desired, a letter, containing five shillings for expenses, may be addressed to X. L., care of Messrs. Stubbs, Chemists, Holborn."

"Humph!" said Kate, "I can understand that better. It is worth while to worry people, if they will send you five shillings in return."

"Now then, look at this from my old friend Miss Joseph. And, putting the three together, tell me if there is not some connection between them?"

Miss Joseph had already written several times, giving the mournful details that she knew would be valued; but it was the first time she had mentioned her own proceedings. "You see by my address, dear Adela, that I am lodging at the Museum, having at last come to terms with Dr. Thaddeus, who wanted to have everything his own way, and put me on the same floor with the snakes and lizards. I have a decent bedroom at the top of the house, quite out of their reach; and here my headquarters will be for the present, to which I can return after any necessary journeys. You are very good to invite me, and I shall look forward to such a visit as a reward; but I have work to do first. It is time you knew that Mrs. Dangerfield gave me the key of her desk, telling me it contained a packet of papers, which were to be delivered to you after her death; and that when I opened the desk as she desired, no such packet was there. My own opinion is that the key was taken from me during my sleep from the effects of an opiate, and the papers extracted; but I am unable to say by whom, though I have strong suspicions. At any rate, I failed at my post, and cannot look you in the face till I have retrieved my error."

"This throws some light on your anonymous correspondent, certainly," said Miss Combermere. "Stay, here is a postscript, which will perhaps tell us more.

"The doctor asks if Emily will find him some creatures, whose names he has written down, which are to be found at the English Lakes. I hope they are harmless."

"Dear me," commented Kate, "I hope so too. Have you any idea what they are?"

"Only caterpillars of one or two moths. The Archdeacon and Emily hunted them up out of one of his books, and at the proper season will supply the demand. It is evidently meant as a prescription for her mind; and by what I have seen of the doctor, we may be glad to compound for nothing worse."

"Defend me from such remedies," said Kate: "and let me advise you, in strict confidence, not to allow the Archdeacon to do what he pleases with your rooms. He will make a museum of them, if you don't take care. Ah, Emily!" as the object of their solicitude came in at that moment, her cheeks tinted with the fresh air and exercise, and her eyes bright with animation, "you will soon know the country here, and all that is in it, much better than I do."

"Eyes and no eyes, Miss Kate," said the Archdeacon, who followed his young companion, and began deliberately to empty his capacious pockets of all the specimens, animal, mineral, and vegetable, with which he had been illustrating his peripatetic instructions. The civil dismay in Miss Granard's face, as she endeavoured to rescue her books and portfolio from the unwelcome miscellany, without hurting his feelings, or damping Emily's pleasure, amused Kate. It behoved her to strike in to the rescue.

"I cannot help thinking, Emily," she said, "that Dr. Thaddeus would like us to get up a collection of our own, from which we could supply him as he requires. Suppose you ask Mrs. Keith if she can spare that little room where the sewing machine is, and get Charles to fit it up with shelves and cases?"

The suggestion was hailed with applause; and while the child ran to coax Mrs. Keith, who could refuse her nothing, the young ladies made the Archdeacon sit down, and read the letters. He did so, making no comment till he had finished. "What is young Archdale about in London?" he asked abruptly.

"He has just begun work in Mr. Bourne's counting-house," explained Kate. "He is to learn his duties for the first month without salary, and then begin on a moderate one, to be raised according to his merits."

"Give me his address."

Kate wrote down the number and street of the lodgings, where the mother and son generally resided, when in town.

"I don't think it will do to ignore these facts," was his remark, as he made a few notes in his pocket-book, "and somebody had better look up the party at Stubbs the chemists, and see if it be something more than a swindle. About that boy a serious question arises. You remember his saying, when the child was frightened at

the Court, that there must be a confederate in the house, and the sooner she was out of it, the better?"

They remembered it well; and neither liked to own how uneasy it had made them.

"Well, if 'One who knows' speaks the truth, we may decide at once that it was all a trick to get Emily out of those quarters, whence it would not have been so easy to carry her off."

"That I cannot believe," said Adela.

"I do not say I believe it myself; but if Paul has been maligned in the matter, he deserves a handsomer recompense than to be left to his fate. And I, for one, am not satisfied to do so. I should like to see him well horsewhipped, or well pensioned, according to his deserts."

"I would give a great deal to be sure of his safety, if only on Emily's account," said Adela: and she proceeded to describe the child's sufferings at night, in words that set the Archdeacon striding up and down the room in excitement. Emily's return to the room stopped what he was going to say, and caused him to calm his impatience.

"Don't you think it would be a very good plan to ask Dr. Thaddeus about the museum upstairs, Emily, and get him to tell us exactly how the cases should be made, and so forth?"

Emily thought it would be an excellent plan. "Then make all your preparations as fast as you can, and when I come back we will begin in real earnest," said the Archdeacon.

"Where are you going, then?" asked Emily, in a tone of disappointment, while the young ladies looked at him in surprise.

"I am going over to Ostend, to consult Dr. Thaddeus."

(To be continued.)



A LEGACY OF GRATITUDE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT."

CHAPTER III.

LUIGI CORONI.

BETWEEN four and five years passed away. During that time Coroni was shot in a skirmish, and died of the wound: poor Marietta survived him only three months. The intelligence reached me in this manner:

A little business had taken me one day into one of the lower neighbourhoods in the East-end of London, when a hand was laid timidly on my arm and I was accosted in Italian. I turned at the once familiar sounds, and beheld before me a bundle of rags with a man inside them. "Ah, signor, do you not remember poor Pinelli?"

It was Pinelli, indeed, but so changed that I hardly recognized him. In a few words he told me that both Coroni and his wife were dead, that the band was utterly broken up, that he, Pinelli, had been obliged to fly for his life, and after various adventures and wanderings had found himself in cold, gloomy London. "But I have brought Luigi with me," he added. "You remember the little one, signor? I could not leave him behind, the child of my captain and of my cousin. No, no! Pinelli could not leave the orphan to fall into the hands of those bloodhounds. May they die accursed and never see the gates of Paradise!"

"Luigi in London!" I said.

"Si, signor. You see I had heard a great deal about London, and I thought that if we could once get here everything would go well with us—that the rich English would give me plenty of money for playing in front of their houses, and that I should be able to keep Luigi as his father's son ought to be kept. Ah, what a mistake! All day long and half the night I used to trudge through the bitter streets, and when I had done, after paying the hire of the strumento, there was often hardly enough left to buy the boy's supper and my own. Luigi often begged me to send him out with some white mice, but you see, signor, I wanted to keep him like a little gentleman, if I could only do so. However, I agreed that he should go out on sunny afternoons among the lords and pretty ladies, and see if he could bring home a few lire to help pay for our room, when all at once the child fell ill. There was no one to nurse him but myself, and he grew so much worse in a day or two that I could not leave him. We should have starved, signor, in our little room but for some kind friends, who were, however, almost as poor as ourselves. Well, the

boy began to mend a little by-and-by, and in a day or two more I thought that I should be able to go out again and earn some money; but one morning I began to shiver from head to foot, and then I went all of a burning heat, and I knew that I had got the ague. That was a month ago, signor, and I am but just beginning to crawl about again. How I and the boy have lived through it all, the saints alone could tell."

"Well, Pinelli, I am very sorry to hear such a bad account from you," I said. "I should like to see Luigi again. I suppose you do not lodge very far from here?"

"But a very little way, signor. The boy will go wild to see you again. He spoke your name in his sleep the other night, so that you must be often in his thoughts."

"But I left my address with him. Why did you not write to me, or send me some kind of a message?"

"The paper left by the signor was in our luggage, which was stolen from us one night at a little inn where we were staying, and neither Luigi nor I could remember the strange English words, or understand the meaning of them."

A walk of five minutes through a rookery of low streets, and then Pinelli stopped in front of a house, each floor of which, and, in many cases, each room of which, was occupied by a separate family. The portion of this terrible den which the two Italians called their own was a small, semi-dark, mildewed, underground back-kitchen. Seeing my very natural hesitation to enter this wretched hole, Pinelli called out, "Luigi, where art thou? There is some one to see thee."

Forthwith there emerged from the foul-smelling gloom a tall, thin, cadaverous-faced boy, with bright, hectic-looking eyes and long dark elf-locks falling over his shoulders. He was clad in rags that would scarcely hold together, and in one thin, wasted hand he clutched a hard dry crust, at which he had evidently been gnawing a moment previously. He blinked at me suspiciously for a moment or two, the daylight being too strong for his eyes: then all at once a look of recognition flashed across his face.

"Il Signor Dottore!" he cried, as he dropped his crust and sprang forward as though he would have thrown himself into my arms, as he used to do in the old days among the hills. But even in the next moment he shrank away, and staggering with a low cry against the door-post, he sank to the ground, hid his face in his hands, and began to cry as though his heart would break. A sense of his rags, his dirt, and his wretched surroundings had smitten him suddenly. He remembered where and how he had seen me last, and the contrast was too much for him.

What relief is there to the overwrought heart like the rush of long pent-up tears? I soothed the boy as well as I knew how, and after a few minutes he could listen calmly to what I had to say. He was fearfully emaciated. The vitality of his young life seemed thoroughly

sapped. I was afraid that consumption had already set its mark upon him. It was needful to get him away from that noisome den as soon as possible.

Pinelli was at once sent out to purchase certain necessaries, and I waited with the boy till he came back. Coals and wood were the first articles to arrive, and in a few minutes Luigi and I had a merry fire roaring up the little chimney. How the lad cowered over the blaze, how he gloated over the unwonted warmth, turning himself round and round as though he could never have enough of it! Presently Pinelli returned with some tins of soup, some bread, and a little wine, together with sundry other articles. I did not go till the hot soup was ready to put on the table, and then it was with a promise to see them again on the morrow.

See them again on the morrow I did. The first thing to be done was to get them away from that horrible den, the next was to drive them to a ready-made clothier's, where they could exchange their rags for some decent attire. Then we drove to the nearest public bath, and when, at the end of an hour, Pinelli and the boy emerged from it, I hardly knew them, and was no longer ashamed of being seen in their company. For the time being I located them in the house of a gardener who had formerly been in my father's service, but who was now living in one of the northern suburbs of London. There they remained for a little while till I could make some further arrangements, all they had to do in the meantime being to grow strong and well as quickly as possible.

Pinelli's hardy constitution soon recovered itself, and in less than a fortnight he was ready and anxious to be earning money again. He professed himself as being glad and willing to attempt any kind of work that I might choose to put him to, but I was not long in finding out in which direction his inclination lay. The result was that I bought him a brand-new organ, built on an improved principle, and set him up in business on his own account. I never in my life saw a man more proud than Pinelli was the first morning he started out with his new instrument. Had he been blessed with a wife, I am sure he would not have prized her half so much as he prized his organ.

The question now was what to do with Luigi. At this time he was a tall, thin, handsome boy of twelve, with a certain air of distinction which sat easily and naturally upon him. One thing seemed to me very certain: he must be sent to school. He was entirely ignorant on nearly every subject that an ordinary British schoolboy knows by heart, while, on the other hand, owing to the strange life he had led ever since he had left his mother's arms, he had picked up a mass of information and experience very much of which would have been far better unlearned. It would never have done to let him go out with Pinelli on his daily rounds, as his vagrant instincts would have prompted him to do. No: to school he must go. But for all that, I greatly doubted whether Luigi, with his wandering proclivities,

his untamed habits, and his volatile temperament, was the kind of boy likely to settle down quietly into the groove of the ordinary English schoolboy. Still, it was undoubtedly necessary that discipline of some sort should be brought to bear upon him.

In this quandary I bethought me of Lascelles, one of my old college chums. Lascelles, I knew, was now married, and added to his slender income by receiving a few boarders to educate for the public schools. Why should he not try his hand on Luigi? I wrote to him, telling him as much about the boy's antecedents as I deemed necessary. "Send the boy by all means," was the reply by return of post. "I have some reputation as a disciplinarian. I will make a special study of your protégé. My wife, who has great powers of persuasion, shall give him his first elementary lessons and lay a ground-work, and I will do what I can to develop the latent moral forces of his disposition."

Nothing could be better, I thought. The only difficulty was to persuade Luigi into seeing the case in the right light, which for a long time he declined to do. The thought of being sent away to live among strangers, where he would never see either Pinelli's face or mine, was one to which he could not reconcile himself. It was only at last by appealing to the memory of his dead mother, and impressing upon him what she would have liked him to do, and by Pinelli telling him that he would never grow up to be an English gentleman—Luigi's greatest ambition—unless he went to an English school, that he finally consented to go. Perhaps the new clothes, and the pretty boots, and the fine white shirts which he would wear if he went to school, were not without their influence on his decision; for Luigi was as fond of finery as a girl.

In any case, he went, and I congratulated myself on having worked out a knotty problem satisfactorily. I had one or two notes from Lascelles giving me encouraging accounts of his new pupil's progress. "Coroni has one of the quickest intellects for a boy that I ever met with," he wrote. "If his powers of application only equalled his abilities, he would by-and-by carry away the highest prizes in the school. But we must not expect too much at once."

Luigi had been at school a little more than three months when I received a note from Lascelles which filled me with consternation. It appeared that one of the other pupils, Edward Stratton, and Luigi had had some words in the playground about a disputed question of top-spinning. Stratton, losing his temper, had called Luigi an organ-grinding Italian; Luigi had retorted by calling Stratton's father a pork-butcher. (It would appear that that worthy individual was in the wholesale provision line.) This being more than the English boy could stand, he had thereupon landed a blow straight from his shoulder in Luigi's face, which was immediately smothered with blood. With a cry like that of a wild animal—so the other boys said—Luigi at once sprang upon his assailant, and, drawing at the same time from

some hidden pocket a knife, which no one suspected him of carrying, he aimed a blow straight at the English boy. Fortunately the other boys were too quick for him. They rushed upon him and disarmed him, but not till Stratton had received an ugly gash across his knuckles in his efforts to defend himself. For a moment all were busy asking Stratton where he was wounded, and when they turned to look for Luigi he had disappeared, nor had all their efforts to find him since been successful. The house, the grounds, and the out-buildings had all been thoroughly searched, but no trace of him could be found. Parties of labourers from the neighbouring farms were still engaged in beating the country for several miles round, at the time Lascelles' note was despatched. There was no water anywhere near the school, in which he could have drowned himself.

Such was the comforting news which greeted me, and when I read it I mentally wished young Coroni back among his native hills. I at once telegraphed to Lascelles to spare no expense in his efforts to trace the boy. Three mornings later I received a note, telling me that Luigi was not yet found, that nothing further could be done, and that the matter was now left in the hands of the police.

Two evenings later, as I was crossing the lawn on my way to the post, a figure suddenly emerged from among the clumps of evergreens, and sank to the ground close at my feet. The night was dark, and for the moment I was startled, but the one word, "Signor," uttered in an accent of piteous entreaty, told me next instant who was before me. Taking the boy by the wrist, I led him back without a word to the lighted drawing-room. A wretched object met my gaze.

Hollow-eyed and hollow-cheeked, his hair matted with sweat and dust, his clothes torn and bespattered with mud, and with the soles of his thin boots completely worn away, Luigi Coroni stood before me. He had walked from the farthest border of Essex to London, begging a crust of bread or a drink of milk here and there, where he thought he could do so without danger, sleeping under a hedge or the lee of a hay-stack by day, and trudging wearily forward mile after mile as soon as darkness set in. All this I learned later on, but just then I spoke no word to him nor he to me.

I rang the bell. "Take this boy and give him something to eat, and a bath, and then let me see him again," I said to the servant.

I at once posted a note to Lascelles, telling him that the lost one was found, and instructing him to stop any further search by the police. By return, I received a small parcel, which, on being opened, proved to contain the knife, of which Luigi had nearly made such terrible use. With it was enclosed a note from Lascelles, in which my friend stated that, after what had happened, it was of course out of the question for him to take Coroni back, and he further counselled me to get rid of my protégé as speedily as possible, otherwise there was no knowing in what terrible scrape he might some day land me. At the foot was a postscript by Mrs. Lascelles: "It will be a

great mercy if Luigi Coroni does not end his career at the gallows." I flung the letter into the fire, in a fume.

Long before this I had talked with the boy. Not that he had much to say for himself. "He struck me, and that made me see fire, and I don't know what happened after that," was all that I could get out of him. The mischief of it was that I could not be sure that Luigi felt himself to be in the wrong; indeed, I was almost sure that he felt himself to be in the right: and that, let me argue with him as I might, and try to prove to him the heinousness of his offence, should a similar contingency ever arise in future, he would act in precisely the same way. Let him but feel himself grossly insulted, or let his hot Italian blood once be thoroughly fired, and it seemed as natural to Luigi Coroni to settle his quarrel with the assistance of a knife as it would to an English boy to make the best use of his fists. In Luigi's eyes it was morally the right thing to do that you should try to stab your enemy. It was an instinct, so deeply implanted in his nature, that I despaired of ever being able to eradicate it.

I did not fail to let him see how deeply I was grieved and annoyed by what he had done. I let him come and go almost without noticing him. When I had occasion to speak to him, I did so in a sharp curt way, very different from the tone I had always adopted towards him previously. Sometimes this treatment made him sulky and defiant, but more frequently he moped about the house, wandering from room to room, curling himself up in out-of-the-way corners, restless and unhappy; or following me about with beseeching eyes, that seemed to say, "Will you never speak a kind word to me again?"

Luigi had been back nearly a week, when one evening, about eleven o'clock, I strolled down the lane to smoke a meditative cigar and try to arrive at some final decision as to what would be the wisest thing to do with the boy in time to come.

It seemed to me that in taking the lad's future into my own hands I had saddled myself with a very serious responsibility. Would it not have been better if I had left him as I had found him, with no higher ambition than to accompany his uncle about the streets with an organ or a few white mice? What good had I done, either him or myself, by trying to educate him and instil into him the manners and instincts of a gentleman? His father before him had been a brigand, and he himself would be a brigand at heart as long as he lived. Polish him and veneer him as one might, the half-tamed robber of the hills could not help showing his teeth now and again.

But next moment I blamed myself for my harsh thoughts of the poor boy. When I called to mind the surroundings of his childish years, and how his earliest impressions must have been formed, it seemed to me that, whatever the result might have been, I should have had no right to marvel at it. Ought not the fracas with young Stratton to be looked upon as a logical consequence of the boy's

antecedents and early training, and was the boy himself really very much to blame in the matter? Instead of being disheartened by the partial failure of my efforts up to the present time, ought I not to persevere still more earnestly in my endeavours to reclaim this wayward young mind. If I were to discard him, who else in the wide world would do anything for him? The chances were that, at his age, if I were to let go my hold of him, he would gradually, but inevitably, sink into a life of squalor and degradation, from which he would never emerge again. For such a result, would he or I be the more to blame?

And then again, when I called to mind the lad's brightness, docility, and intelligence, when I thought of his quick, vivacious ways, and the unbounded affection that he evinced towards myself, my heart softened towards him, and I made up my mind, there and then, that, come what might, I would never abandon him.

I had flung away the end of my cigar, and was about to turn homeward, when my ear was attracted by the sound of rapidly approaching footsteps on the hard dry pathway. The lane was a lonely one. There had been two or three burglaries in the neighbourhood lately, and it struck me that I might just as well wait and see who it was that was coming along in such a hurry. I had been leaning over a gate, and was still standing in the shadow of the high hedge, so that I was all but invisible from the footpath. I had not many seconds to wait. A dusky figure emerged from the darkness, came nearer, passed me, and would have vanished again, had I not strode quickly after it and laid my hand on its shoulder. I had recognised Luigi as he passed me. He was hurrying along at a sort of dog-trot pace, following the footpath mechanically, his white, eager face turned up to the stars. As he hastened along he was muttering something to himself in Italian—a language that he rarely spoke now, except in moments of excitement—and gesticulating wildly, with his clenched hands and long thin arms, while every few seconds a sort of half-sob seemed to burst involuntarily from him.

"Luigi," I said, as I touched him on the shoulder, "where are you going?"

He collapsed at my touch as though he had been suddenly paralysed, and sank in a trembling heap at my feet.

"Going?" he stammered out. "I was going nowhere."

"Don't tell me an untruth, Luigi," I said, sternly. "You have no business here at this time of night."

"I was going away, signor."

"Where were you going?"

"I don't know. Anywhere. I am tired of my life. I hate myself. I—I hate everybody."

"What folly is this?" I said. "You talk like a silly girl, and not like a boy with any manliness about him. Come back home at once."

"I cannot—I cannot," he moaned. "All day long, signor, you hardly ever look at me, or speak to me, and when you do look at me your eyes freeze me. They seem to say, 'You have disgraced yourself and disgraced me. Why don't you go back to your own country?'"

"Luigi Coroni, you are a young idiot," I returned. "If you were my son I should give you a sound thrashing. That would be the best medicine for such folly as yours. Come: I cannot wait here all night."

His only reply was a low, inarticulate cry. Then, before I knew what had happened, he had twisted himself out of my hands, and had started off at full speed down the lane.

I stood staring after him for a moment, bewildered by this sudden move, and then I started in pursuit. Fast as he might run, I knew that my long legs would quickly overtake him. A quarter of a mile further the lane opened on to the high road, but I calculated that I should come up with him before he got even as far as that. "He cannot escape me," I said to myself. But hardly had the words passed my lips when the flying figure in front of me suddenly swerved aside, and bounding over a narrow stile that made a gap in the hedge, was racing next moment across the pasture on the other side. He gained a second or two by the move, but I was quickly through the stile and following in his footsteps. I could dimly discern him some fifty yards or so ahead of me.

For the first few moments I was at a loss to comprehend what his object could be in thus taking to the fields, but all at once I remembered, with a sickening feeling of horror, that on the opposite side of the meadow, across which we were now racing, was the canal. Surely the desperate boy could not be going to attempt suicide! I redoubled my efforts to overtake him, but he still kept considerably ahead of me.

The canal was now no great distance away, although, in the darkness nothing could be seen of it. A little to the right of the line in which Luigi was running, a bridge spanned the sluggish stream, and it was with a feeling of infinite relief that I saw him heading in that direction. Once let him cross it, and reach the level fields beyond, and I must inevitably overtake him. "Yes—he is going to cross the bridge," I said, and hardly had the words escaped me when he was on it. But instead of crossing it, he stopped suddenly short in the middle of it, and resting his hands for a moment on the parapet, he bounded lightly on to the top of it. For the space of two or three seconds his slight boyish figure, as he stood thus, was clearly outlined against the starlit sky; then he suddenly clasped his hands above his head and sprang headlong into the black waters below.

A cry of horror burst from my lips. By this time I was close to the banks of the canal. A moment later I was on the towing-path, within a dozen yards of the spot where Luigi had first struck the

water. I knew that the boy could not swim an inch, if his life depended on it. Even while my eyes were scanning the water to watch for his reappearance, I was mechanically thrusting off my shoes and coat. There he was! head and shoulders showing above the surface for a moment, and then, with a low, gurgling cry he disappeared once more. But I marked the spot, and two minutes later I had him safely on the bank. I said no word to him, nor he to me. I wrapped my coat round him, lifted him in my arms (he felt little more than skin and bone), and started homeward at a rapid pace, taking a cross-cut through the fields.

"And have I driven the boy to this?" I asked myself, as I paced along. "Fatherless, motherless, and now, at twelve years of age, he is so tired of his life that he tries to put an end to it! I have been too hard with him—too hard."

I bent my head and kissed his cold, wet forehead. A low sigh, that seemed to breathe of happiness and sweet satisfaction, was his only response, but he knew that from that moment the past was forgiven.

Beyond a severe cold, from which he recovered in the course of a fortnight, Luigi took no harm from his immersion. He was his old happy self again, and it was hard to believe that any tragic possibilities, or unsounded depths of latent crime, could lurk behind that sunny face, or those merry, laughing eyes. The problem, what to do with him, was still an unsolved one, but, for the present, it was left in abeyance. My aunt Honeyton had taken him under her wing for the time being, and she it was who set him his lessons from day to day. She was continually singing Luigi's praises. "I never knew a boy who was so quick at learning, or so docile in every way," she often said. "He ought to make a very clever man, and he will if he is properly managed."

But all my perplexities with regard to Luigi's future were suddenly put an end to. One day I was surprised by an unexpected visit from Pinelli. He was dressed in a new suit of clothes, a huge watch guard was festooned across his waistcoat, and his face was one broad grin of satisfaction. A rich uncle had died, and had left Pinelli his sole heir. The ex-brigand was going to give up organ-grinding, go back to Italy, realize his property, and settle down into a respectable member of society. As a matter of course, he wanted to take Luigi with him.

"But I thought you told me that a price was set on your head by the authorities," I said; "and that if they once got you into their clutches you would either be hung or shot?"

"I am a rich man, now, signor, and I shall know how to manage all that," returned the fellow, with a sly twinkle of the eyes. "In my country a few thousand scudi will effect many wonderful things. Besides, I am not going back to Calabria. My uncle had a farm and a vineyard a few miles from Naples, and I shall settle down there

for the rest of my days. Everything will be Luigi's when I am gone."

"But what do you intend to do with Luigi? He ought to have three or four more years at school."

"I have thought of all that, signor. I intend Luigi to study the law. When he grows up he shall become an avvocato."

Pinelli laid his hand on his heart, and swelled visibly with importance as he gave utterance to these words. That his family should one day count an advocate among its members was evidently something to be inordinately proud of. Perhaps, under the circumstances, the idea was as good a one as could have been suggested. Luigi would certainly have been out of his element as a cultivator of grapes, nor was there anything about him to induce me to think that he would have felt more at home as a son of the Church. With his quick and apprehensive intellect the probability was that he would feel more affinity for the Law than for any other profession.

He did not attempt to disguise his sorrow at having to leave me, but, all things considered, it certainly seemed to me best that he should go with Pinelli. He was heart-broken when the moment came for saying farewell, but I knew that by the time he had travelled fifty miles his impressionable fancy would be taken up with the strange faces and strange scenes around him, and that the sharp edge of his regret would quickly wear itself away.

CHAPTER IV.

AT LARCH COTTAGE.

SEVEN years had come and gone since the events recorded in the last chapter. My father was dead, and for three of those years Larch Cottage had been my permanent home. Every few months I had heard from Luigi Coroni, and the burden of his letters was generally the same. Penelli was well, and ever remembered me with gratitude and respect. Luigi made good progress with his studies. Occasionally, at long intervals, he came over from Italy to see me, and he was now on one of these visits to Larch Cottage.

Coroni was now about twenty years of age. He had developed into an extremely handsome young man, and possessed an easy gaiety of manner, mingled with an air of courteous deference towards others, which was very fascinating, especially to ladies. He was quite a dandy in his way, but was too much addicted to velvet coats and jewellery for my simpler tastes. But it was impossible to apply the same standard to a young Italian that one would to an Englishman of the same age.

Luigi was fairly accomplished, in the society sense of the term. He could speak English, French, and Italian with almost equal correctness and purity of accent. He had a charming tenor voice, which he

knew how to use to the best advantage, and he was a facile if somewhat showy player on several instruments. He had a natural gift for mimicry, and could give clever imitations of the leading actors of the day. He could sing love songs to the ladies in three languages, and accompany himself on the guitar, while, for those whose tastes were less frivolous, he could declaim long passages from the "Inferno," with amazing fire and judgment. He had studied for the Law, as Pinelli had promised that he should do, but whether he would ever earn his living by his profession was quite another matter. At present he seemed in no lack of funds, and to have nothing to do but see the world and enjoy himself. He had spent a couple of years in Paris at one time or another, but it was doubtful whether he had been improved thereby. In any case, he was a very pleasant inmate to have in a country house, and could do much towards entertaining the other guests. He looked up to me with a strange mixture of reverence and affection, and would watch me about from place to place with something of the same expression in his eyes that I have seen in those of a faithful hound. To Luigi's thinking, there was no man in the world in any way comparable to the friend who was associated with his earliest recollections.

"Luigi Coroni; and asleep."

It was Arthur Forester who spoke. We had gone into the smoking-room to have a last cigar, and a quiet chat, before separating for the night. On turning up the gas we found Luigi stretched on the sofa, fast asleep.

"He's tired out, poor fellow," continued Forester, as he laid a hand caressingly on the young man's curls. "No need to disturb him until we go to bed."

Accordingly we drew our chairs up to the fire, lighted our cigars, and let Coroni sleep on.

For five years Forester had been in China, fulfilling an appointment there. He was now in England on a six months' leave of absence. After that, he would return to China for three years, and then come back to England for good. He had been spending a month with me at Larch Cottage, and this, the last night of his stay, had arrived.

Often during that month, I had been moody and abstracted, for no apparent cause, and Forester had more than once laughingly accused me of being in love, little thinking how near the truth he was. To-night I had resolved to take him into my confidence.

We seemed to have said all that we had to say, and had been smoking in silence for several minutes, when at length, after a glance over my shoulder at the sleeper, I spoke again.

"You may, perhaps, remember," I said, "the miniature of a young girl I was wont to carry about with me in the old days, and, indeed, wear still?"

"Quite well," returned Forester, smiling. "You saved her life while bathing at Scarborough; and I remember telling you the young lady would one day become a woman, and prove dangerous to your peace of mind."

"As you foretold," I replied, "so it has come to pass. To make a long tale short, Arthur, Mary and I have been engaged now for the last three years. I think I told you that, as an only child, she would probably one day come into a large fortune. Her father died about eighteen months ago, but the mother still lives—a scheming, ambitious woman. I had Mr. Harewood's full and free consent to my engagement with Mary, but Mrs. Harewood has always looked coldly on my pretensions. Only one consideration reconciled her in any degree to our engagement. That was the probability of my one day coming into the family title and estates. She knew that my uncle was a widower and childless, that my father's health was delicate, and that in all likelihood I should ultimately become Sir George Raymund, of Grantley Towers. In view of this contingency, she gave a grudging consent to my engagement with Mary. I believe the woman is foolish enough to think that her daughter ought to look at nobody of lower rank than a lord. Mary and I, however, have contrived to be very happy together, despite her mother's ungracious treatment.

"You know already that some three years previously to his death my father entered into a series of disastrous speculations, which ultimately resulted in the loss of half his fortune.

"As a consequence, when his will was proved it was found that his son would be by no means so rich a man as the world, in its wisdom, had supposed he would be.

"Mrs. Harewood did not fail to let me know how deeply she felt the disgrace, as she termed it, of having allowed her daughter to engage herself to a person who had turned out to be so very much poorer than he had any right to be. She did her best, both by tongue and pen, to sting me into breaking off my engagement with Mary. But I saw through her scheme and kept out of her way as much as possible. So long as Mary remained true to me I cared but little for what either Mrs. Harewood or the world might think or say.

"But another blow was in store for me, of which I never dreamed. About three weeks ago I received a letter from Mrs. Harewood in which she said that she had been informed, on most excellent authority, that my uncle, Sir Marmaduke Raymund, was on the eve of contracting another marriage. If such should prove to be the case, she said, she must insist upon my engagement with Mary being cancelled at once and for ever.

"I was dumfounded for a time, and yet, when I came to think the matter over, there was little real cause for surprise. It was quite within the range of probability that my uncle should marry again, but

he had been a widower for so many years that, half unconsciously, we had all got into the way of believing that he would remain one for the rest of his days. The most evident thing to do was to make some enquiries on my own account, with the view of ascertaining the truth or falsehood of the report in Mrs. Harewood's letter. Accordingly, I at once wrote to an old friend of my father, who lives within a couple of miles of Grantley Towers, and who makes a point of being acquainted with all the gossip and scandal of the neighbourhood. I did not receive his answer till this morning. Here it is."

I took a letter from my pocket and opened it. Both of us glanced at Coroni. His soft and regular breathing told us that he was still asleep. "As my old friend writes rather a crabbed hand, perhaps I had better read you what he says," I remarked. "After apologising, on the ground of his absence from home, for not answering my letter sooner, he goes on thus: 'I am afraid that I shall have to answer the main query in your letter in the affirmative. There can be little doubt, I think, that your uncle contemplates matrimony again—more fool he, at his time of life! His *innamorata* is the widow of a major of artillery, who, after living in Cheltenham for two or three years, took, last summer, a furnished villa not far from here and began at once to set her cap at your uncle. From what I can make out, she is a clever, bold, and unscrupulous woman; not without her share of good looks, you may be sure, but terribly "made up"—at least, my women-folk hint as much to me. She looks eight-and-twenty, acknowledges to being thirty, but is, in all probability, nearly forty years of age. She is one of those women who have the art of always looking a dozen years younger than they really are.

"If the widow looks a dozen years younger than her age, your uncle looks a dozen years older than his. I am told that he drinks harder than ever, and I know for a fact that he has had two sharp attacks of illness within the last twelve months. What a queerly assorted couple he and the widow will make. What a struggle there will be for supremacy; but I would lay long odds that the widow will come off victor in the long run.

"Some one who has just come in tells me that the painters and upholsterers are already up at the Towers, and are turning the place inside out. Also, that the wedding is to take place at the beginning of May."

"I am very sorry for you, my dear fellow," said Forester, as I returned the letter to my pocket; "very sorry indeed. One of the dearest wishes of my later days has been that I might live long enough to see you master of Grantley Towers. So Mrs. Harewood's information seems to be correct?"

"There cannot be a doubt of it," I answered.

"Have you replied to her letter?"

"Not yet. In fact, I hardly know in what terms to answer it.

Of course, it's quite within her province to break off the engagement between Mary and myself; but although Mary may refuse to marry without her mother's consent, not all that mother's power can force her into marrying against her will. Mrs. Harewood will have to choose between permitting her daughter to wed the man of her choice, and seeing her remain unmated for life."

"Mrs. Harewood will be sure to give way," said Arthur; "if not at once, at all events in the course of a year or two."

"I am not so sure of that. She is obstinate to a degree when once her mind is made up. Besides, she has set her heart on her daughter marrying a title. No; I know the kind of woman Mrs. Harewood is. Mary will be badgered and worried, and her life be made thoroughly wretched, while I, knowing what she will have to put up with, can hardly be accounted the happiest of men. But there's two o'clock striking. High time to go to roost and forget our troubles in sleep."

We rose and pushed back our chairs. Coroni was still sleeping. I shook him gently by the shoulder. He started up, rubbed his eyes, stared about him, and apologised for his apparent rudeness. Then he accompanied us into the hall and took his bed-candle at the same time that we took ours.

Forester left Larch Cottage next morning, and three weeks later sailed for China again. A fortnight after landing at Hong Kong, happening to take up an English newspaper, he was astounded to read in it an account of the death of Sir Marmaduke Raymund, of Grantley Towers. It was too true. He had been found dead in his bed. Heart disease of long standing was declared to be the specific complaint which had brought his life to so sudden a close. Forester wrote to congratulate me on my accession to the family honours, and bade me not to forget to send him a slice of wedding-cake, even though it should have to travel all the way to Hong Kong.

CHAPTER V. AND LAST.

THE DEBT PAID.

FOUR years later Arthur Forester's health broke down and he returned home for good. He soon picked up strength and appetite in his native air, and one of his first visits, after he was able to visit anyone, was to his friend Sir George Raymund. For three years now I had occupied Grantley. Mrs. Harewood's objections had disappeared with my changed prospects, and Mary and I had married as soon as I came into the title. When Forester came down to me he found the household increased by two sturdy youngsters who called me papa.

A great part of my time was taken up with looking after the improvement of my property, and in striving to undo the manifold evils wrought by my predecessor. Nearly everything had been

allowed more or less to go to rack and ruin, and both time and money were needed to bring back the property to its original condition.

Arthur generally accompanied me in my walk or ride over the estate between breakfast and luncheon. On such occasions our conversation often fell upon old times and scenes of long ago. In the course of one of our rambles Coroni's name cropped up, and Forester asked me when I had last heard of the young Italian.

"He is dead," I answered, sadly enough. "He was shot during the terrible days of the Commune."

For a moment there was silence. Arthur seemed much affected, for he had taken a fancy to Coroni. In a little while I spoke again.

"When Paris was about to be invested by the Germans, Luigi chose to remain shut up in it rather than go away. He thought that by so doing he should see some aspects of life different from anything he could ever hope to see again. You know that he was rather clever with his pencil, and he thought that during the siege he should be able to make a number of sketches which he could afterwards elaborate into pictures, and that thereby both fame and money might accrue to him. He pulled through all right until after the Germans had left Paris, but his insatiable curiosity induced him to still remain there after the city was given over to the wild frenzy of the Communist mob. He was sketching a night attack on a barricade when he was shot down by one of the assailants. He was carried to a hospital where he lingered for nearly a month and then died."

Later in the day I said to Forester: "Come into my den for half an hour, Arthur: I have something to show you."

When he had drawn a chair up to the fire, I unlocked a drawer in my bureau and drew therefrom a thin roll of paper. "I did not know of Coroni's death till three months after the event," I said. "Then I received a visit from the priest who had attended him during his last hours, and who furnished me with all particulars of the affair. He also brought with him these sheets of paper, on which Luigi, after he was wounded and knew that he could not recover, had written down, a few lines at a time, a most startling and remarkable confession—so remarkable, indeed, that, with the exception of my wife, I have shown it to no one till now. You, however, shall read it, because I want your opinion as to whether you think I ought to take any further steps in the affair, and if so, what those steps ought to be. The priest, of course, was acquainted with the contents of the paper—indeed, it was he who urged upon Luigi the necessity of putting down in writing the facts stated therein, they having been made known to him previously under the seal of confession. But with him, of course, the secret is as safe as though it had never been told. The original paper is written in Italian, but I have made a literal translation of it. Before you begin it, however, I may just say that Luigi left Larch Cottage rather suddenly some three or four

days after your departure, and that though I occasionally heard from him afterwards, I never saw him again." I drew my chair closer to Forester's, unfolded the manuscript, and gave it him to read. It ran as follows:—

"DEAR AND BELOVED SIGNOR,—On this bed of death, on which I now lie, my thoughts turn to you more frequently than to anyone else. I shall never see you again, but the good father who visits me here has told me that, before it is too late, I ought to put down in writing my account of certain matters which very nearly concern you. He has promised that if I will do so he will himself convey the paper into your hands, and that no eyes shall see it before it reaches you. My intention was to die without saying a word of that which follows; and it is only at the good father's earnest persuasion that I have been induced to pen this confession.

"Do you remember, signor, a certain evening among the hills when you, I, my father, and my mother sat together for the last time? You were to leave us on the morrow, and the time had come for me to bid you farewell. Then my father laid his hand on my head: 'Luigi,' he said, 'never forget that this gentleman has saved thy mother's life. If at any future time it should be in thy power to do him any service, whatever the cost may be to thyself, thou wilt not fail to do it.'

"I have never forgotten my father's words. I have never forgotten the promise I then made. But years, many years passed away; and it seemed as if no occasion would ever arise to enable me to prove that my father's command still dwelt in my memory.

"The long-awaited-for occasion came at last.

"Do you remember, one evening, now more than two years ago, during the time I was on a visit to Larch Cottage, when you and your friend found me fast asleep on the sofa in the smoking-room? Perhaps you have forgotten a circumstance so trivial, but I have not. In any case, there I was. You and your friend smoked and talked, and by-and-by I awoke. But you were sitting with your backs towards me and you did not see me open my eyes. Some words that you were saying induced me to lie very still and shut my eyes again. I heard you tell your friend that your uncle, the great man who drank so much brandy, was about to get married, and that because such was the case a lady whom you loved and who loved you could not become your wife. And you never knew that I had heard a word.

"But the words I heard could not let themselves be forgotten. Day and night they fluttered in my brain like young birds fluttering in their nest. I could think of nothing else. At length I made up my mind that I would seek out this great Sir Marmaduke and see for myself what kind of man he was. I bade you farewell, little thinking, alas! that I should never see you again. Two days later I was at Grantley Towers.

"My face and hands were stained, and I was dressed like a Roman pifferari, but instead of carrying the Roman pipes, whose music the Inglesi do not care for, I carried my favourite violin. Finding my way to the back of the great house, I began to play a merry dance tune before the windows where I saw the servants at work. At first they ordered me away, but I only laughed and nodded my head and went on playing. By-and-by they came and stood in a cluster to listen to me. I played tune after tune for them till they were tired. Then they made me go inside, and gave me a little money and as much food as I could eat and carry away with me. I led them to understand that I could only speak a very few words of English, but when they said, 'Come again to-morrow,' I laughed and nodded my head to show that I knew what they meant.

"I did go again on the morrow, and several times afterwards. Little thinking that I could understand them, the servants talked freely enough among themselves about Sir Marmaduke's coming marriage, and wondered what sort of a mistress the new wife would prove to be. Sir Marmaduke was nearly always away in the evenings when I was there. He went to see the lady he was going to marry, and when he came home he had nearly always had too much brandy. The other servants laughed at Pierre, the valet, because his master never forgot to swear at him before getting into bed, and Pierre laughed in his turn, because he never forgot to pay his respects to the decanter which stood on the little table by his master's bedside.

"I wanted to see this Sir Marmaduke, so I hid myself one night among the laurel bushes near the great door and watched him come home. He was helped out of his carriage by Pierre, whom he did not fail to abuse. He was lame and walked with a stick. He had grey hair, and a very red face, and little, fierce, blood-shot eyes. 'Great heavens!' I said to myself, 'is this the miserable life that stands in the way of my beloved signor's happiness?' The heavy doors clashed behind him, and I walked across the dark fields to my bed in the barn of the village inn, thinking as I seemed never to have thought before.

"Night after night I hid myself among the laurels and watched. I found out which was Sir Marmaduke's bedroom. A scheme, a great scheme, began to shape itself slowly in my brain. It took days and nights of thinking before it stood out in all its completeness. But there it was at last. I laughed aloud and played merry tunes on my fiddle, though I was all alone. The promise I had given my father was about to bear fruit at last.

"Sir Marmaduke's bedroom was on the first floor. It had two French windows, which gave access to a balcony. All night long a faint light burnt in the room. Night after night I watched those windows from my hiding-place among the laurels. At length my plan was ready for carrying out, and I had only to wait and watch for my opportunity.

"That opportunity came when, one night, Sir Marmaduke reached home more helpless than usual. Without Pierre's aid he would have fallen, and it was Pierre's arm that supported him up the steps, and across the hall, and upstairs to his bedroom. He could not swear to-night, though he tried hard to do so. He could only growl inarticulately in his throat.

"I watched the light in the bedroom. I saw Pierre's shadow cross the blinds. Then in a little while the candles were put out, only the faint night-light being left burning; and I knew that Pierre had left his master to repose. By-and-by the other lights went out one by one; and an hour later the whole great house was wrapped in darkness; all except the two windows in Sir Marmaduke's room, which stared into the night like two wan eyes from which the light of life was slowly dying out. An hour longer I waited, till I felt as if I and the wind and the trees—so lonely was it—were the only things alive on earth.

"Then I made my way to a certain greenhouse which, I knew, from a secret visit previously paid, contained the very article I wanted. That article was a gardener's ladder long enough to reach from the ground to the balcony of Sir Marmaduke's window. Five minutes later I stood on the balcony. Listening intently, I could hear Sir Marmaduke's hard breathing inside the room. With the blade of my pocket-knife I pushed back the catch of the window; then I slipped off my shoes, pushed back one sash, drew the blind gently aside, and found myself in the baronet's bedroom.

"Sir Marmaduke lay on his back, asleep, and breathing heavily. On the little table close at hand stood a night-light and a decanter of brandy. I stood and looked in his face for a minute or two. There was no fear of his waking. Then, from one of my pockets I drew a cambric handkerchief, new, and white as snow, which I had bought a few days before. In another pocket I found a tiny phial of chloroform. (Ah! signor, it was from you that I first learnt some of the uses of chloroform. My poor mother used to say that it was sent by the saints as a blessed gift to us poor sinners.) Having saturated the handkerchief with chloroform, I spread it lightly and gently over the sleeping man's face. He never moved. I sat down by the bedside and waited. A yellow-backed French novel lay on the floor. I picked it up and read a chapter. After three minutes Sir Marmaduke ceased to breathe so loudly: after six minutes he did not seem to breathe at all. The easy-chair in which I sat was comfortable, the French novel was entertaining, I was in no hurry and could afford to wait. At the end of an hour I put down my book, rose, and drew the handkerchief from off Sir Marmaduke's face. He was beyond the powers of all the doctors in the world to bring back to life.

"I put the handkerchief in my pocket. I overturned the decanter of brandy and let its contents drip from the table on to the floor.

The strong smell of the spirit would overpower the faint odour of the chloroform. I stole out of the room as noiselessly as I had entered it, and closed the window after me. In the balcony I found my shoes. I went down the ladder and carried it back to the greenhouse. The greenhouse was warm, and I slept there till the first streaks of daylight began to show themselves.

"What a commotion in the neighbourhood next forenoon! Sir Marmaduke had been found dead in his bed. Three or four doctors were sent for post-haste—as if they could be of any use now! They could only shake their heads, look wise, and whisper, 'Heart disease.' I lingered in the neighbourhood a day or two longer, then I took the train for London, threw off my pifferari dress, and started for Paris. My heart was light as a feather. I had rid the earth of a wretch who was unfit to live; I had done the one man whom I loved better than all the rest of the world an inestimable benefit, and I had paid the legacy of gratitude left me by my father."

Here ended the confession. Forester folded up the MS. and returned it to me.

"There are a few more lines," I said, "chiefly expressive of regret at not being able to see me again, but it is not needful to read them."

"A strange confession, indeed," remarked Forester, after a pause. "And one of the strangest features in it is that the writer seems rather to glory in what he has done."

"He did glory in it, undoubtedly. The old priest who brought me the MS. told me it was only by threatening to refuse him absolution that he could get Luigi to express the slightest sorrow for his crime, and that, even then, he felt sure the sorrow was merely on his lips and never touched his heart. To Luigi's pagan mind—and a pagan he was to all intents and purposes—what he had done seemed an essentially meritorious thing to do, and he could not comprehend why anyone should blame him for it. To benefit a friend and get rid of an enemy at the same time was the true philosophy of life, as Luigi understood it."

"And you have never read this MS. to anyone but your wife and me?" said Forester.

"To no one else. And now, Arthur, I want your advice as to what you think I ought to do in the matter."

Forester paused a few moments, then replied: "Sir Marmaduke is dead, Coroni is dead, and you, the legal heir, have come into your rights. These are facts which nothing can alter. My advice is that you put back the MS. into your bureau and say nothing about it to anyone."

ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

I.

ONE spring morning, many years ago, the clock of a village church about a day's journey from Paris chimed out the hour of six. At that moment an ambitious young man named Dumas attained the age of one-and-twenty. His mother stood at his bedside, but there was grief, not rejoicing, in her face. Her eyes rested fondly yet sadly on the figure of her son, who slept soundly in spite of having just attained his majority. Pride and affection prompted Madame Dumas to wake her son on this particular morning, which should have been a joyful one to both; but anxiety held her back, and her only greeting was a tear which fell upon his face.

This, or that indefinable sense we sometimes have in sleep that somebody is near us, roused the young man.

"Astir already, mother!" he exclaimed gaily. "As you are one of the only two persons in France who know what a distinguished youth has just attained the dignity of manhood, no wonder you are up early! But you are in tears! How is this?"

"Forgive me," murmured Madame Dumas with a sob; "I am sick at heart."

"And why, mother? Is it because everybody but ourselves is careless whether Alexandre Dumas has lived for twenty-one years, or whether no such person exists? Parbleu, we shall soon enlighten the world on that subject!"

"Ah! my son," said his mother, "the lightness of your heart makes mine the heavier. I wished to conceal from you the misfortune which threatens us, but now I must speak. What is to become of us I cannot tell, for we have only five louis left!"

The revelation did not strike Dumas as very dreadful, for, taking his mother's face in both his hands, he burst into a laugh.

"Only five louis! Do you know how many men have bribed Fortune with less? Of course you don't, but I tell you I am going to be a remarkable addition to the number." Then seeing that her tears were starting afresh, he added: "Really and truly, mother, I have an idea—a marvellous idea. Let me get up, and I will tell you all about it. A man cannot cogitate satisfactorily in bed—at all events, I can't. Depend upon it, my idea will be the making of us."

Madame Dumas shook her head sorrowfully, and quitted the room.

As a matter of fact, the young man had not the ghost of an idea, and the expression of confidence which had animated his features a moment before was succeeded by a look of utter perplexity.

"May the deuce run away with me," he muttered, "if I know what to do!"

In this frame of mind he proceeded to dress himself. Looking about for his cravat, he saw a kitten playfully tearing it in a corner. Going to the rescue, he perceived a small piece of paper, which he mechanically opened. It was the back of an old catalogue in which had been wrapped some new pens, and on it was a name, printed in large characters, at sight of which he struck his forehead, and rushed off in search of his mother, leaving the kitten to demolish the cravat at her leisure.

Madame Dumas gazed in astonishment at her son, who burst into her room with a shout, and relieved his feelings by waltzing with as much of the furniture as was movable. The mother's heart received a new shock. Had Alexandre, under the pressure of their troubles, suddenly gone mad?

"Look, mother!" he exclaimed, throwing himself breathlessly on the couch beside her.

She took the paper from his hand, and read the words to which he pointed: "Paris. Imprimerie Dupont."

Madame Dumas' mind was as much a blank as before, and again the terrible fear as to her son's mental condition passed through her like a knife.

"Yes, Paris!" he cried excitedly. "There must be many patriots there able and willing to help the widow of an old soldier. I will set off this very day. Three of the louis will be enough to take with me; the remainder will support you till you learn the result of my venture. Without doubt, I shall find work to sustain us both. Now, mother, what do you think of my idea?"

Not being possessed by the illusions and the enthusiasm of one-and-twenty, Madame Dumas could not see the visions which her son had conjured out of the old catalogue.

"My son," she said, "you have yet to learn that bright dreams and a good heart do not always win their way in this world. How many people I have met, who, while I pleaded to them with my tears, passed, like the priest and the Levite, on the other side! Alas! you will meet with trials and disappointments of which you have now no thought."

The young man laid his fingers caressingly on her lips.

"I charge you, mother, to cease this doleful strain! No more discouragement, I entreat. I am off now," he added, taking up his hat, "to see my old tutor, the curé. He has the wisdom of the serpent and is sure to give me some useful hints. Au revoir!"

Half an hour later young Dumas returned, triumphantly brandishing a letter of introduction to a retired general, resident in Paris.

"Behold my passport!" he cried. "No cause to despair now, mother. The curé is quite of my way of thinking, and this letter is a key with which I shall unlock all the doors in Paris that are worth

opening! The general is a kind-hearted old boy, and has scores of friends to whom he is sure to introduce me. In a week, or a fortnight at latest, you may expect me to come for you, and we will make a triumphal entry into Paris together. Do you know, the curé says the general has a bullet in his right knee which has been there for twenty years. It baffled every surgeon in the army, and the general says it is the only enemy he was never able to dislodge."

So he rattled on, as he made his preparations for departure; and Madame Dumas fancied that it was all a dream, until she felt her son's arms around her, and heard him whisper a few broken words of farewell.

A minute afterwards she was supporting herself against the garden gate, striving to see through her blinding tears the receding figure of Alexandre on the high road to the capital.

II.

FROM this sketch of Alexandre Dumas at the age of twenty-one the reader will easily perceive that those brilliant heroes of romance whom we have all followed through so many volumes of adventure were all counterparts of their prolific author. Like them he had abundance of spirits, ready resource, remarkable self-confidence, and that ceaseless unrest and dash of movement which would have made Messieurs Athos, Porthos, and D'Artagnan traverse half a mile of powder barrels, though every step increased the hazard of being blown to the four winds.

The lively imagination of Dumas had exaggerated the virtues of his letter of introduction. He waited upon one officer of distinction after another who had known his father, and though all received him with civility, none proposed to put themselves to the smallest inconvenience to do him a service. The last upon his list was much worse off in worldly circumstances than his brother soldiers, and as Alexandre mounted to the fifth floor, on which eminence the general had made his habitation, he felt like the leader of a forlorn hope.

But an agreeable surprise was in store for him, for after listening to his story, the old officer shook him warmly by the hand and said:

"It is enough, *mon ami*. We are comrades. Your father shared his purse with me. What should I think of myself if I refused mine to his son?"

Then he gave Dumas a letter of recommendation to a personage of high rank in the army, who had great influence with the powers that were. This, Alexandre—whose recent experience did not dispose him to expect much from people who dwelt in their own hotels, and displayed their armorial bearings on the gates—presented, with much inward misgiving.

"Ah! you are the son of Dumas," said the general, stroking a very grizzly moustache. "He was a lion on the field, and he and I did

wonders together in Egypt. Well, you want employment. What do you know?"

Dumas differed from his famous musketeers in one respect. He had some modesty—at this period, at any rate—and he answered:

"Not much; a little Latin."

"Hum! No mathematics?"

"That is a file I could never get my teeth into."

"So much the worse for you. However, I will try to do something. I dine this evening with the Duc d'Orleans; I will speak to him about you, and perhaps he will find you a place. Leave me your address."

As Dumas wrote down the locality of his humble quarters, the general patted him on the shoulder.

"Tenez, mon ami. Your position is assured. With that handwriting you will have no difficulty in getting employment as an *expéditionnaire*."

To tell an aspiring *littérateur* that he would make an excellent copying-clerk seemed to Dumas about as reasonable as to invite an eagle to take up his habitation in a dove's nest. It was not a time, however, for expostulation, so, suppressing his feelings, Alexandre acknowledged the compliment to his handwriting with the best grace he could command. A few days later he was formally invested with the dignity, and entitled to the emoluments, of an *expéditionnaire*.

In this capacity Dumas supported himself and his mother for more than three years, devoting his leisure to the composition of tragedies, which he burned one after another. Sick of the society of his colleagues in the office, he determined to seclude himself; and, after hunting about for some time, he discovered in the bureau a sort of closet, black, dusty, and scarcely large enough to admit a human being, in which were stored the ink-bottles and other appurtenances of his calling. Here Dumas established himself, glad of any place, however uncomfortable, in which he could woo the Muse undisturbed in the intervals of bondage.

The office porter, who occasionally explored the recesses of the closet, was indignant at this usurpation, and lodged a complaint, which was so effectual that Alexandre was compelled to evacuate his fortress. Accordingly, he returned to the common room, where he was received with much sarcasm.

But though it might be necessary, as the proverb has it, to howl with the wolves, it did not follow, in Dumas' opinion, that he ought to bray with the donkeys, so he made representations to a high official, the result of which was that he received an order formally making over to him the haunt which he coveted. Next day he took possession of his little kingdom of four feet square, and heedless of dust, ink-bottles, and red tape, buried himself in his manuscripts.

Presently the porter appeared and threatened Dumas with the wrath of the chief if he did not move out at once.

"J'y suis, j'y reste!" replied Alexandre, little thinking that this phrase would one day have the honour of being employed by the head of the French nation.

Then, as the porter became more aggressive, Dumas took him by the collar and deposited him gently in the corridor.

This achievement brought up the chief of the bureau in a fury, and the audacious expéditionnaire was ordered to quit the place on penalty of losing his post. Suddenly Dumas thrust under the nose of the enraged official the permit he had received from headquarters, and the enemy sullenly withdrew, leaving the embryo dramatist to make a note of the situation he had so dexterously brought to a climax. It was, however, rather a hazardous method of studying dramatic effect.

III.

THE tragedies continued to follow one another to the flames, Dumas having no hesitation in immolating the offspring of his imagination when they did not please him.

Suddenly Dumas received an inspiration which carried him to a higher point than any he had yet reached. "Hamlet" was represented at the Théâtre Français, and amongst the Parisian playgoers—not a great multitude—who entered into the spirit of that tragedy, none were so enthusiastic as young Dumas. He applauded till his arms ached, and then went home with his head full of a new progeny of ideas which soon found embodiment in the play of "Christine de Suède." This composition was not burnt, and Alexandre now faced the formidable task of getting his tragedy introduced to the public. He had written it; but to strive to have it produced on the stage seemed like entering on an insane struggle with impossibility. Even supposing his energy and perseverance to be unconquerable, the problem was something like that of the old schoolmen, as to what would happen in the event of a collision between an irresistible force and an immovable object.

In those days there was attached to the Théâtre Français a government commissioner whose duty it was to act as a sort of foster-mother to unknown authors of merit. When he discovered a genius he introduced him to the manager. As may be easily imagined, the office was not a sinecure. The commissioner was beset by candidates for his favour from morning till night.

With his tragedy under his arm, Dumas waited one day upon this functionary, who, at that time, was M. le Baron Taylor. M. le Baron was engaged with another dramatic author, so Dumas amused himself as best he could in an ante-room.

It was Baron Taylor's habit to have new plays read to him while he was in his bath, or performing his toilette, and at this moment he was listening, or affecting to listen, to a fashionable personage who had conceived the idea that dramatic literature was his vocation,

and who was inflicting on the hapless commissioner five acts of appalling dullness.

At the end of the fourth act the Baron felt that he must do something to get rid of this terrible infliction.

"Suppose we postpone the fifth act," he suggested in a faint voice. "I am really not equal to it to-day."

"But, my dear Baron, the dénouement! You must hear that. I assure you it is totally different from what you expect."

"Not at all," gasped the commissioner. "I believe it is so tragic that your present audience will be dead before your hero! Spare me that catastrophe, I entreat!"

"Spare you, indeed!" exclaimed the nettled author. "It would be a thing unheard of! You don't appreciate a tragedy, M. le Baron; but let me remind you that you are paid by the government to listen to me, and listen you shall!"

"True," groaned the Baron; "but the government does not give me a constitution, and I cannot endure any more of this!"

Here he made an attempt to get out of his bath, but the implacable dramatist thrust him back, determined to drown him rather than let him escape from the terrible fifth act. The torture was resumed, but Nature asserted herself, and long before the end of the reading the commissioner was slumbering peacefully.

"Well, what do you think of it?" said the fashionable personage, giving his victim a shake.

"Eh?" muttered the Baron, drowsily.

"What is your opinion of my tragedy?"

"Is it all over?"

"Yes."

"Oh, then, it is magnificent!" And bounding out of the bath, he snatched up his garments and disappeared into his dressing-room.

He had scarcely taken breath when there was a knock at the door, and Dumas was announced.

"Another tragedy!" ejaculated the Baron; and he sat himself down in despair.

Seeing the commissioner in a condition of extreme undress, Alexandre hesitated to open his manuscript.

"Oh, take a chair and proceed," said the Baron, with the air of a man about to have a tooth extracted. "You will excuse me if I go on dressing, as I am rather in a hurry. Begin. I am all attention."

Dumas read the first act. When this was finished he glanced at the commissioner, who was standing in front of him, with his shirt half on, evidently absorbed in the play.

"Perhaps I had better stop here, M. le Baron, and read you the rest another day," said Dumas. "I fear I am imposing on your good-nature."

"Imposing, young man ! No such thing. What you have read to me is admirable. I am determined to hear every line before you leave the house. Ciel ! if you knew what I have gone through this morning, you would not want to rob me of this compensation !"

Thus encouraged, Dumas read the rest of his tragedy with all the expression of which he was capable. As he pronounced the last word he raised his head and saw that the Baron had not altered his position, and was no further advanced with his attire than before. When he spoke, it was to the point.

"Come with me to the Théâtre Français at once, mon ami. Your fortune is made."

Breathless, Dumas accompanied the commissioner to the theatre. The manager named a day when the play should be read to the artists. The day came ; the tragedy was received with acclamation, and Baron Taylor set out for the country to repair the ravages made in his constitution by senseless tragedies, having first had the satisfaction of seeing it announced in the newspapers that he had discovered a new dramatic genius.

IV.

WERE the difficulties of our author at an end ? By no means. The commissioner being absent, the enthusiasm of the sociétaires of the Théâtre Français for "*Christine de Suède*" seemed to cool, for three months passed away, and there was no sign of preparations being made for the production of the play. Meanwhile, it was necessary to live, and Dumas had perforce to fall back on his hand-writing, and earn bread for his mother and himself by copying the documents which poured into his miniature workshop at the bureau in greater numbers than ever, for his colleagues were resolved that he should have as little leisure as possible for any other occupation.

But in due course Baron Taylor returned, and his first act was to stir up the sociétaires on the subject of "*Christine de Suède*." The indefatigable Dumas had, however, completed a prose drama, "*Henri III. et sa Cour*," which he submitted for approval, and this, it was unanimously decided, should take precedence of the tragedy.

But the time which Dumas was now obliged to give to the theatre made his appearances at the office rather irregular, and this misdeemeanour, greatly exaggerated by those who were envenomed against him, led to the loss of his post.

Deprived of his resources just when he seemed on the point of grasping fortune, Dumas felt his heart sink for the first time, as he saw his mother, weakened by illness, in want of daily bread. To her the future was still as hopeless as on the morning when her son left her to tread the thorny and uncertain road to fame.

"My poor boy, you have made a dreadful mistake, and this prospect of a glorious career will be the ruin of us both. Think of our

position if your play should not succeed! The butt of jests and sarcasms, you will be thrown upon the street without food and without a roof to cover us. Alas! you have given up the work which fed and clothed us, for the sake of a deceitful vision that can end only in wretchedness!"

With this wail in his ears, and a cruel anxiety gnawing at his heart, Dumas attended the rehearsals of his play. An actor in the company, to whom he partly confessed his position, lent him money enough to keep his mother alive, while he himself lived he scarcely knew how. Such was the situation of the man who, even at that moment, was the envy of all the obscure authors in France.

The night of the first representation of "Henri III." was fixed. A few hours before the performance Dumas made his last throw. He appeared before the Duc d'Orleans and solicited the presence of that prince at the theatre. Whether the Duc was surprised by the audacity of the quondam expéditionnaire into acquiescence, or whether he simply obeyed the impulse of a naturally kindly heart to perform a generous act which cost him nothing, or whether he thought that the courtly element in the play demanded, in the interests of the government, his personal recognition, it is needless to determine. Suffice it that when the curtain rose on the first scene of the play the Duc d'Orleans entered his box accompanied by all his suite. Royalty, like charity, conceals a multitude of imperfections, and perhaps it is not too cynical to suggest that this interest of the Duc in the play of the unknown author made the blemishes of the production less obvious than they might otherwise have been. From this point the success of "Henri III." was never doubtful. The ingenuity of the plot and the briskness of the scenic movement delighted everybody, and the Duc d'Orleans applauded with great vigour in the right places. When the curtain fell, and, in response to the demands of the audience, the manager announced the name of the author, the Duc stood up in his box, and raising his hat, gave the signal, as it were, for that remarkable popularity which, luckily for Alexandre Dumas, rested on a more solid foundation than royal condescension.

Edmund Kean, flying through the muddy streets to his wretched garret to tell his wife the glorious news of his triumph at Drury Lane, and Alexandre Dumas hurrying home to infuse new life into the veins of his sick and starving mother with the story of his success, are companion pictures. The latter seems to appeal more strongly to our sympathies, for the mother's joy over the fortunes of her son must have been mingled with a pathetic self-reproach that she had done so little to sustain that confidence in himself which had been so brilliantly justified.

"THE DREAM OF THE MOONBEAMS."

SENSATIONS were something like angel visits in Saint John's parish—very few and far between. Sometimes a breeze of news would blow in from the great outside world, to make a little ripple on the surface of society, and people went about for a few days talking of the matter which had stirred them up from their usual repose. A stagnant, peaceful, uneventful repose—as most of the few inhabitants of St. John's Dene found it. St. John's Dene was a small aristocratic village, with its one church: and really, the doings of that church constituted about all the business that arose there. The St. John's people prided themselves on this sleepy kind of existence, and to speak of any dreadful event in connection with them, such as a theft or an elopement, would be sure to bring down the indignation of that pretty place. Sometimes an event occurred among themselves which furnished food for chat and gossip for several days, and then life went on as it had been going on before the little social whirlwind came to set the atmosphere of St. John's Dene in brisker motion than usual.

Just now something great had occurred. The sleepy old organist, Mr. Gray, suddenly resigned his position as organist in St. John's church. He had occupied the post for many years, and everybody regarded him as a fixture. Accordingly, when he announced that he was going away from St. John's Dene, and that the trustees of the church had better be looking about for some one to fill his place, people were all astir with the excitement. Not so much that the quiet old man should be leaving them, as that they would want a successor to him.

It was all managed very quietly. The clergyman, Mr. Thorpe, proposed a gentleman whom he knew—a young man of good family, who was not a professional, but would take the place for a time. He was not rich, and the salary would be useful to him.

Of course there arose a great flutter among the young ladies of St. John's Dene. A handsome young organist would be a decided acquisition. Of course he was handsome! It would not be at all in accordance with the fitness of things if he turned out to be ugly.

Being a gentleman, and not a professional, they considered themselves justified in being curious upon the point.

The pretty little church was crowded on the first Sunday of his appearance, and every individual member of the congregation, of the gentler sex, had considered it her duty to put on her most becoming apparel and to look her best. Even Alice Cramer, one of the most sensible of girls, and the only daughter of proud old Mr. Cramer, of the Grange, as she stood before her glass that morning, getting ready

for church, had thought of the new organist, and pulled about the 'pray of white roses and half-opened buds that sat in her bonnet and half mingled with her soft, wavy brown hair. Letty Thorpe was going to wear her new bonnet that day, as Alice knew, and she and Letty stood side by side in the organ-loft together, being two of the singers.

"Papa," said Alice, entering the library, where her father sat, a white silk handkerchief thrown over his head, "are you sure you are not well enough to go to church to-day?"

"Of course I am not, Alice," was Mr. Cramer's peevish answer. "Did I not say so at breakfast?"

"But the new organist, papa, will be there."

"The new organist!" repeated Mr Cramer, in reproof; "what's the new organist to me? You know how these neuralgic headaches unfit me for anything when they come on. There; go; and shut the door, Alice."

To have to go to church by herself was nothing new to Miss Cramer. Mr. Cramer was at best a hypochondriac: especially had he been so since the death of his wife, three years ago, and Alice was now left much alone. The governess, Mrs. Bird, who had resided with them so long, had been called away by the illness of her mother. She had promised to return to Alice, as chaperon and companion, as soon as she should be at liberty, but it was hard to say when that time would be.

The new organist, Robert Karl Leith, sat before the organ when Alice ascended the stairs of the organ-loft, and took her place next to Letty Thorpe. She could not see much of him, except that he looked slender and gentlemanly, and had very fair hair.

"He is not at all like what I expected," whispered Letty to her. "Not in the least."

"In what way?" whispered back Alice.

"Not so handsome. I had pictured a dark, handsome man, with beautiful dark eyes. But there's something very nice about him, and one can see he is a gentleman. He will just suit your taste, I suppose. You like fair men."

The new organist chanced to turn round at the moment and caught them looking at him. Being a modest, retiring girl, Alice blushed, partly at that, partly at Letty's words. Mr. Leith thought it was one of the sweetest faces he had ever seen. A true, pure face, with a clear beauty in it like a star.

"How can you say such things, Letty!" she whispered in reproof. "And in church, too!"

The church was filling rapidly, and the organist began the voluntary. A ripple of pleased surprise ran through the ears of the congregation as he struck the opening chords. It was very different from Mr. Gray's playing. That was always a jog-trot kind of performance; this was the touch of a master. The old organ seemed suddenly to

have shaken off its drowsiness and renewed its youth. The rich, full, mellow harmonies filled the church and soared heavenward on the air of that still, beautiful morning, as if they were the voices of angels praising God.

"Is it not charming," whispered Letty, who could not keep silent though she was in church. "I have just heard that he is a German, and we all know how they play."

"Hush!" breathed Alice. "It is very beautiful."

The grand full chords seemed in perfect harmony with the peace that sat in her heart.

Mr. Leith's first essay as organist of St. John's Dene was very successful, winning him the favour of the congregation. His playing was so entirely different from Mr. Gray's that they began to wonder how they could have been content with that worthy gentleman's accomplishments. The churchwardens after service shook hands together, and congratulated themselves on their good luck in securing so satisfactory and efficient an artist. And then they turned and shook hands with himself at the church door. Letty Thorpe, with her usual disregard of conventionalities, invited him, under her mother's very eyes and hearing, to the Parsonage on the following evening, where they were going to have a small party for music.

"I will come," he replied, smiling: and Alice Cramer, standing by, thought what a pleasant smile it was, and how it transfigured to momentary beauty his otherwise rather plain face. "At present I seem like a man in a desert here, knowing nobody."

"We will introduce you to plenty of people to-morrow evening," cried chattering Letty. "And this is Miss Cramer, of the Grange, my very particular friend."

Mr. Leith bowed to Alice, and if he did not absolutely say the introduction was a pleasure, his eyes certainly expressed it. Letty was beginning to talk again; but at that juncture her father came out of the little vestry door and approached, and the young lady had to subside into silence.

Robert Leith settled himself down in Mr. Gray's old apartments, and speedily became at home in St. John's Dene. He was a gentleman, and he was a truly magnificent player on both organ and piano: two very good essentials to success in society. The parson and Mrs. Thorpe took a great fancy to him; they saw that he was, in every sense of the word, a good man, and he was well known to some relatives of theirs in London. It was from these relatives that Mr. Thorpe had heard of him. Miss Letty became nearly as intimate with him as a sister, and patronized him extensively. There was no other kind of love in her heart for him, and she made no scruple of saying so openly, to himself and to others; he was not the kind of man she could ever select for her true knight. Mr. Leith laughed, and said he hoped she would let him be as her brotherly knight, then and always; he would serve her with all a brother's fealty.

"Why do you call yourself a German?" she asked him one day.

"I never do call myself a German," he replied. "Other people, I believe, call me one sometimes."

"Why should they?"

"I am half German. My mother was German, and I have been a great deal in Germany."

"And your father was one of our clergymen, and had a great living, papa says."

"Yes," said Mr. Leith. "But my father and mother are both dead now, and I am alone."

"They died while you were at Oxford?"

"At Cambridge—not Oxford. My father wished me to go into the Church also: but I preferred music."

"Do you mean to say you are going to be a professional?—a real professional?—to get your living by music?" cried Letty, opening her eyes wide.

"I have a very little income at present, just what suffices to keep me in bread and cheese—truly it is little more that it does—and I am content to plod on patiently and work and wait and perfect myself, and perhaps in time I shall be one of our great composers, such as those great masters Mozart and Beethoven," replied the young man in simple candour.

"But why did you come down to St. John's Dene?" wondered Letty. "This place will not help you on to greatness."

"I came to St. John's Dene because I was ill. Ailing, that is," he added, correcting himself. "Some of my good friends thought London was too close for me, and that I was over studying besides. They chanced to hear that this place wanted an organist, and they said if I would only consent to come here for a time, the country air and the rest would set me up."

"But you study here. I have heard you say so."

"Oh yes. That I should do wherever I might be living. But I am already as much better as it is possible to be."

"So you don't intend to stay here! You only came for a time?"

"That is all."

"I am very sorry; and so I think will Alice be. You see we all like you very much already. It is such a change from old Gray. He was seventy at least, and took snuff."

Robert Leith laughed. It was not the first time he had heard himself favourably compared with Mr. Gray.

In return for the kindness shown him at the Parsonage, Mr. Leith asked to be allowed to superintend Letty's music. That young lady had no very particular genius for it; she was careless and impatient, and she never sat down to the piano without setting Mr. Leith's teeth on edge. A little good instruction and some steady practising would improve her greatly, as he represented to Mrs. Thorpe, and they gratefully thanked him, and accepted his offer.

"I wonder whether the young man would take Alice as well?" cried Mr. Cramer, one day that the clergyman was calling at Dene Grange. "Since Mrs. Bird left, Alice has missed her music lessons. He might charge me first-class terms for it."

"I have no doubt he would take her," said Mr. Thorpe. "But as to charging—I don't know that he would accept anything at all for it; he will not for Letty. He is not a music master, you know."

"Then that, of course, puts an end to the matter," returned proud Mr. Cramer. "I will have nobody teaching here who is above being paid for it."

The parson laughed to himself. He knew the old gentleman's failing. "I will ask him whether he will undertake Alice, and charge for it," he said aloud. "If he declines, there's no harm done."

Mr. Leith did not decline; he accepted it, a slight colour flushing his face as he did so. Not at the idea of being paid, but from the gratification of teaching that most charming girl.

"Mr. Cramer may pay me as much as he likes," he observed, with a laugh. "A guinea a lesson, if it pleases him."

"You will have to name the terms yourself: mind that, Leith. And the more you charge the better he will think of you."

"I *will* say a guinea a lesson, then."

So the lessons to Miss Cramer began; two a week. Generally speaking, Alice took them at the Parsonage; though sometimes Mr. Leith went to the Grange to give them. Mr. Cramer took rather a fancy to the young man in his condescending manner, finding him prudent, gentlemanly, and intelligent; and he occasionally invited him to dinner. Afterwards the young man would play for an hour or two on the magnificent grand piano, and Mr. Cramer would listen with a softened heart, and fancy that the old times were back again. His wife, of whom he had been very fond, was a delightful musician, and she used to play to him at these twilight hours.

In that summer the dream of Alice Cramer's life came to her. There are times in the lives of all when the one grand dream of love must arise; the sweetest, best dream of all the dreams we ever know in this world. And some of us wake to a beautiful reality, and some of us to a bitter sense of loss and disappointment.

Alice had never loved. She might have had her ideal, drawn out of poetry and romance, but she had never found it realized. When Robert Leith came, she felt as she had never felt before. Sometimes she wondered why it was that the old vague restlessness was gone from her. But she soon knew; she soon knew. The peace of love, that had come to still the longings and the restlessness of a heart which yearns for something it has never known, told her all.

And he loved her from the first. He saw in her a woman with a sweet and womanly soul, with a tender and trusting heart; and he felt that it would be safe for any man to give his happiness into

the keeping of such a girl as that. Alice would never betray the trust.

The summer days went by, and during their coming and their going these two learned the most beautiful lesson of life from the great and universal teacher we call Love.

One evening, when Mr. Leith called, he brought her a piece of music in manuscript.

He had been there also the previous evening, and found Alice alone, just as she was alone now. Mr. Cramer had one of his bad attacks, that caused him to keep his room. They had spent the evening at the piano, Mr. Leith dreamily playing, improvising, and Alice listening.

"What is this?" she said, as he put the sheet of music in her hand. "You have been composing."

"I composed it here last night, and wrote it out to-day. How is your papa?"

"Papa says he is no better, but I think he is. I hope he will be down to-morrow."

"Shall I play this over for you?"

"If you would!"

He began playing. It was a tender, passionate poem, full of melody; it seemed to Alice, as she listened, that one strain ran through it from beginning to end, and that strain was "I love you! I love you!" It seemed to repeat itself over and over in the slow, sweet measures of the melody. It seemed to her as if his soul, Robert Leith's soul, were speaking to her throughout.

"Do you like it?" he asked, as the last low chord died into silence.

"Yes, I like it," she timidly answered. "It is very beautiful," and her face was bright and her eyes were tender, though he could not see them under the drooping lids. "Would you mind playing it once more?"

And once more that most sweet and dreamy melody floated on the evening air. The piano was very near the glass doors of the open window, and the moonlight streamed in on the music: streamed upon the light hair and side face of the player, and upon Alice as she stood near him. The very situation had in itself enough of poetry and romance to awaken love.

And what of Mr. Cramer? What could that staid old gentleman be thinking of to allow these dangerous meetings? The probability was that Mr. Cramer, nursing himself upstairs and groaning over his ailments, knew nothing about Mr. Leith's being there. If he had known, he would have been perfectly easy. It would have seemed no more practicable to his haughty notions for a music master to presume to fall in love with Miss Cramer of Dene Grange, or for his daughter to fall in love with a music master, than for he, himself, to be made Pope of Rome to-morrow.

Again the last chord of the melody died away into silence. Alice, with a long-drawn breath, went a step nearer.

"What shall I call it?" he asked, turning his face to her in the moonlight. "It ought to be something appropriate to the hour. This evening hour, I mean, that we are now passing together."

Alice shook her head. "There is no name good enough for it," she thought.

"Shall we call it—'The Dream of the Moonbeams'?"

"Yes. Oh yes," she tremblingly whispered; for indeed the hour and its surroundings, and the love in her own heart, were telling upon her. "I have never listened to anything half so beautiful. Will you teach me to play it as you do?"

Robert Leith paused a moment and then rose. His love was telling upon him. He forgot prudence; he flung future troubles to the winds.

"Alice!" he said, as he took her hands in his, "Alice!" Her heart fluttered like a bird's. It told her what was coming.

"Alice, my darling, has the waltz whispered to you what I tried to make it whisper? Has it?" His voice was low and tender, and his face was illumined by that sweet, grave smile of his. "Did you understand it, Alice?"

"I think I did," she answered softly, and lifted her eyes shyly to his for a moment.

"And may I hope that—that you will not reject my love?" he cried in agitation. "Do you care for me, Alice?"

For answer she gave him a smile that told him what no words could have done, for this girl was no coquette: a glad, bright smile that was a reflection from the sunshine in her heart; and as such he understood it.

"God bless you, my darling," he murmured, tenderly kissing her.

Once again he played over the music at her request: a true melody of the moonbeams: and then they stood together and whispered of the future.

Ah, silly people! To suppose that Mr. Cramer would listen to anything so preposterous.

Robert Leith stood before Mr. Cramer the next day in his library: speaking a little of what he hoped to do, and of the fortune that must come to him sometime from his late father's brother. The old man sat dumbfounded.

"Am I to understand, sir," he said, his face pale with passion, "that you have the presumption, the impudence, to ask my consent to a marriage with my daughter?"

"I love your daughter, sir," Leith answered proudly, stung by the old man's words. "I do not wish to appear presumptuous or impudent when confessing it. My family is a good one; and——"

"And my answer is this," cried the old man, in a sudden burst of rage and anger. "If you don't leave my house immediately, I'll

have you put out of it! Do you hear, sir? put out of it by my servants. And if you ever dare to speak to Miss Cramer again, I'll horsewhip you, as I would a dog. Do you know what you are, man, in my eyes?—a fortune-hunter, an adventurer! Don't say a word"—as Leith attempted to speak—"I won't listen to you. Family!—future fortune! how dare you presume to speak of them in connection with Miss Cramer of Dene Grange? Leave my house; and take care that you never darken my door again."

Leith turned away with a white, set face, and left the room without a word.

He found Alice in the sitting-room, and entered it, greatly agitated.

"It is all over," he said. "Your father has ordered me out of the house, and called me a fortune-hunter, and threatened to horsewhip me if I ever speak to you again."

"Oh, Robert, Robert!" she cried, faint and sick, while his own face was pale with passion, for truly it did seem to him that he had been treated with cruel contumely. "And this is the end of it all! And I—I cared for you so."

"This is the end of it all, unless——" He stopped suddenly. "I have no right, perhaps, to ask you what I was about to do, in defiance of your father."

"What?" she gasped.

"To wait. That we should both wait patiently, hoping and praying for better times."

"Papa will never change his mind," she answered. "I know him too well for that. His will is the only law he knows. Oh, Robert, Robert!"

She leaned her head upon his shoulder, and wept bitterly. The dream had come to an end; and it had been so sweet a dream! He put his arms about her as if to keep her. Heaven alone knew how hard it was to let her go.

A footstep—and they were interrupted by the indignant father. His face was perfectly livid.

"Alice," he cried, hoarsely, "leave the room. I forbid you to speak to that man again. Do you hear? If you do, I will turn you from my door. Remember that. And you, sir! you!——"

Mr. Cramer fairly choked with passion, and could not go on.

"I am going, sir," answered Leith. "I was but taking my farewell of your daughter; for I have no intention of defying your mandate: from my earliest childhood I was taught to render implicit obedience to parents. God bless you, my darling," he added in a whisper to Alice as he passed her. "We may not meet again, but I shall never forget you."

Robert Leith went out from the house like one walking in a dream. He never looked at the angry man who stood at the room door with his threatening arm stretched out to point the way; he saw only the face of his lost love, white with pain and wet with tears.

And St. John's Dene got a most unexpected sensation. That same day it was made known that the new organist had resigned his post in the church, and was gone. Absolutely gone. Gone altogether away, bag and baggage. No reason was assigned by him in either of the two notes he sent; one to the clergyman, the other to the principal churchwarden, announcing his resignation and departure. But people had not been living with their eyes quite shut, and the cause was guessed at. St. John's Dene was in resentful despair. Where on earth were they to find another organist at a pinch?—and who would play for them next Sunday?

"This comes of engaging a young man who is not a professional!" grumbled the parson quaintly. "We had better have old Gray back again."

Alice Cramer could have told them all about it had she chosen. Her ruffled old father, entrenched in his pride and his selfishness and his wealth at Dene Grange, could also have told, and to better purpose. But never a word or a hint came from either. Just about this time Mrs. Bird came back; and poor Alice was seen abroad with her, as she used to be, her face sad now, but making no sign.

So Robert Karl Leith disappeared from the sight and knowledge of St. John's Dene. Other sensations arose by degrees for that stagnant place, and he was soon utterly forgotten. The new organist was a plodding man, with a wife and seven children and a bald head. His style was more flourishing than Mr. Gray's: but he had not the magic touch of Robert Leith, which had turned the simplest tune into a nameless melody.

The next great sensation which, in the course of a year or two, arose for St. John's Dene, was the death of the owner of Dene Grange. The Grange and all the rest of Mr. Cramer's property became his daughter's. Poor Alice was rich enough now and her own mistress: but she had never got over her life's disappointment, and her heart was sad. Mrs. Bird stayed on with her at the Grange; and at the end of a year, when the deepest of her mourning garments were put off, they went travelling.

The sunshine of a summer day lay over the German landscape. The languid tints of September had come before the August warmth had gone, and to day the hazy earth seemed to have lost its sharp clear outlines in a vague indefiniteness. The mountains, wrapped about in their warm purple atmosphere, were like something seen in dreams, half-forgotten, and yet real. The hills far away were only the ghosts of hills. The river, flowing swiftly through the valley, was the one thing in all the scene that seemed full of life and action.

Alice Cramer sat down upon a great rock, over which the fingers of fairies had woven a carpet of greenest moss, and looked away across the purple splendour of the afternoon, and thought. She had nothing to do but think now. She was alone in the world, free to

go and come as she pleased. Over the sea the grave was growing green in the churchyard nook where her father slept his last sleep.

The years that had come and gone since the man she had loved, and whom she had never forgotten—whom she never could forget—had kissed her and left her with a breaking heart, had brought some changes to her. She had grown more womanly; there were traces of the refining work of sorrow in her face. But it was a pure and beautiful face still.

In all these years she had heard but once of Robert Leith. Chancing to open a newspaper which especially noted the doings of the art world, both of music and painting, she saw his name—Karl Leith. It was how it appeared there. The paragraph stated that he had gone abroad to study. That was all. Since then he seemed, as before, to have dropped out of her world, leaving no trace behind him.

This afternoon, as Alice sat in the quiet of the summer-autumn day, she fell to thinking of him. No very unusual thing. She wondered if their paths would ever meet again. If he only knew that nothing kept them apart now, unless some cruel fate was interposing, would he come to her? In the last days of her father's life the old man's proud spirit left him; and he told Alice that if the time could come over again he might not oppose her. So there was no impediment now. And then the thought came to her, dwelling on these past things, that perhaps Robert had forgotten her. But he had told her at the last that he never would forget her, and she believed he could not. She judged him by herself, you see.

The quaint German village below her grew dim as the sun dropped out of sight behind the mountains. She fancied that the valley, full of a cool, purplish-gray mist, now that the sunset had come, was a sea; that the village, growing more and more indistinct, was being swallowed in this ideal sea; and then she laughed at herself for such fancies.

The clatter of wheels down the rocky road caused Alice to lift her head. She saw, faintly enough in the evening light, the red jacket of the postillion, as he cracked his whip and drew up before the door of the inn.

"Some travellers," she said, rising and wrapping her light shawl about her. "Probably English; I will go down and get a look at them. It will be quite a new sensation here—as we used to say at St. John's Dene." It was a somewhat inaccessible spot, this little remote German village, and could only be reached by post-travelling, or on foot. Not half a dozen strangers were in it now, including Alice and Mrs. Bird.

Alice picked her way down the rocks in the twilight, and sat down in the moonlight, in the garden attached to the inn. The salon looked empty, so far as she could see it through the open windows. Mrs. Bird and the rest, she supposed, were all down at the little well, not yet dignified with the name of Spa. Alice sat on, and

waited for them to return. Of the recently-arrived travellers she saw nothing.

Suddenly, and very quietly, somebody touched the piano. It stood against the wall in the salon, and Alice had not seen it opened since her sojourn at the place.

There was something in the music and the moonlight, taken in conjunction, that held her like a spell. She could not see the player, for the room was full of shadows, but he seemed to be playing with his whole soul.

Suddenly the strain changed. Alice's heart gave a great leap, and then stood still. That melody! Could she ever forget it? Ah, no! It was the one she had retained in her heart; the same beautiful story she had listened to years ago, that memorable night at Dene Grange when Robert Leith declared his love, "*The Dream of the Moonbeams.*" Now there was an undertone of passionate sadness and sorrow running through it, that told of a longing pain which would not be quieted. It was as if the player would repeat to himself the story of his love, while his heart was moaning for it.

The melody died away in a wailing minor chord, and then silence reigned. Alice crept to the open glass doors and peeped in. Some one sat at the piano still; who it was she could not at first see, for the salon was only lighted by the moon. Not just at the very first.

"Robert?" she said, hesitatingly, as she paused upon the threshold: and the man turned his head quickly, and then she saw. "Oh, Robert, Robert!"

He sprang up; he saw her standing there, her face white and radiant in the moonlight. An unutterable gladness sat on her face, just as though the soul shone through it.

"Alice! My Alice!" was all he said, with a low, quiet cry. And he took her into his arms; and they both broke down, almost sobbing. The moon's rays fell about them, white and pure, like the benediction of God.

Is there any need to tell more? How St. John's Dene once more got the "new organist" back again, to its own intense astonishment. But he was a man of consequence now, rich and influential, and gave them beautiful parties at the Grange, and very often took the organ for them on Sundays, delighting the old church with his wonderful touch.

But his wife declares that, but for his playing that particular piece that evening at the inn in Germany, they might never have met again, for he was intending to depart on the following morning. And often on a moonlit night she stands by him, her head on his shoulder, while he softly plays "*The Dream of the Moonbeams.*"

E. E. R.

A LOST LETTER.

WHEN I was a young girl I lived in one of the cleanest, quietest, dullest little country towns in England. It was inland and far from a railway. We were quite below the notice of the most enthusiastic Archæological Society. We had no ruins. Even our church was a hideous brick structure of William the Third's days. Our nearest market-town was six miles away; sometimes our inhabitants went over there to the annual fair, and this was our most exciting jaunt.

To begin with, we had no young men—they very soon emigrated from Westford. Then we were very strict and exclusive regarding "sets," and as the town did not number many inhabitants, it was difficult to find many people quite in one's own set, and consequently fit to visit. I really think the small tradesmen had the best of it. As Bunyan remarks, "He that is low need fear no fall." They had no reason to be exclusive, and consequently exchanged tea-drinkings freely and cheerfully, and made up sociable parties to drive over to the market-town in fair-time. But these vulgar pleasures were of course forbidden to the "upper ten" of the town—our circle was select, doubtless, but very limited.

It was my privilege to belong to the aristocratic section of the community. When both my parents died in India, leaving me nothing but a small pension, my good old aunt at Westford was the only one who offered to receive me. Dear Aunt Jane! her heart was as large as her means were small, and she welcomed me to her neat little home as willingly as if I had been an heiress.

Aunt Jane (my mother's sister) was the spinster daughter of a long-deceased curate of the parish; she lived in a small detached house out of the main street; and was entitled to visit among the highest rank of the town. This first circle comprised the rector, an old man of seventy, a martyr to gout, just able to get across to the church on Sundays, and preach the prosiest sermons ever inflicted on a patient congregation. Next came Mr. Cayford, the curate, a really excellent man, who did all the work of the parish, but who was no addition to the liveliness of the neighbourhood. He was thirty-eight, tall, thin, sandy-haired, short-sighted, a bachelor, and terribly afraid of being entrapped into matrimony against his will.

"Sleepy Hollow" I used to call Westford when I was a pert girl, rather to dear Aunt Jane's annoyance. She loved the town where all her quiet life had been passed. But I cannot complain that my life has been a dull one, ever since the day when a certain young subaltern thought he would pay a visit to the daughter of his kind

old friend whom he had known some years before in her Indian home.

Harry and I had been playmates as children, and when his regiment was quartered at a place ten miles from Westford, it occurred to him to ride over one day and call on Aunt Jane.

Time must have hung heavy on his hands, I suspect; anyhow, he came, and called rather frequently after that; and it ended in his taking me away from Westford altogether. Since then we have travelled pretty well over the world, and I liked our roving life. But then, if Harry had lived at Westford, I might have looked back even to that dull town with affection.

A celebrated doctor may die in London and be hardly missed, even by his patients: but when Dr. Channer, who had attended all the births and death-beds in Westford for half a century, died himself at last, great was the stir in the parish. We all regretted the good old man, but our regret was mingled with anxious curiosity as to who should succeed him. Dr. Channer had been a privileged member of our "first set;" would his successor be a man we could admit to an equal honour? This "first set" only comprised the Rector and Mr. Cayford, Dr. Channer, Captain Ford, a retired naval officer with an invalid wife, a houseful of children, and a minute income; Mr. Simmonds, the solicitor, and a sprinkling of old maids and widows. Our doctor's loss was therefore really a serious one.

About six weeks after Dr. Channer's funeral, Westford was startled by seeing his old house undergoing a vigorous course of painting, papering, and whitewashing. Vans of furniture began to arrive, and the town were informed that a Dr. Mills had come to arrangements with Dr. Channer's executors, and had taken house, garden, and patients at a valuation. Curiosity was now on tiptoe.

Dr. Mills proved quite unlike our old medical practitioner. He was a tall, florid, well-made man, about fifty, with a jovial manner and a loud voice. Old Dr. Channer had been a thin old man, with melancholy tones, as though he had just come from a death-bed. If you were ill and sent for him, he always came in looking as though he expected to find you "in extremis." Now, Dr. Mills would bustle up, and assure you that "he'd soon have you about again," in tones of cheerful confidence.

At first we were a little doubtful about him. Old Mrs. Hammond, one of the chiefest of our "upper ten," pronounced him wanting in refinement—too boisterous. Now, Mrs. Hammond was the widow of a younger son of one of the county families; and once or twice in the year her husband's relations sent her game or fruit from their estate, thus acknowledging the connection with her; so, though she herself was poor, and lived in a small house with one maid, she took rank among us as "one of the Hammonds of C—," and was a great personage in Westford. If she had continued to pronounce

against Dr. Mills it would have been serious ; but, luckily for him, he succeeded in curing her of an obstinate neuralgia which had baffled Dr. Channer's skill. And after this she allowed that he was "a clever man in his profession, a trifle abrupt in manner—but then Abernethy was equally so."

He certainly understood his business, and was an agreeable man to boot. I never quite cared about him myself; I cannot account for the feeling, but somehow he never looked altogether a man one would trust, in spite of his very open, candid manner. Perhaps it was *too* open—but I cannot give any reason for my feeling. Nothing is more difficult to analyse than these instinctive likes and dislikes.

I had no possible reason to think anything but good of Dr. Mills, yet I did not care for him. He was soon liked well enough in Westford, and with good reason : he infused a little life into the general stagnation. As Mrs. Hammond truly said, he himself was a boisterous man ; his voice was loud, his boots creaked, he was big, and took up a good deal of room. Not good qualifications for a doctor, you will say. But he could be quiet in a sick-room, and then he was really very skilful—far in advance of his predecessor. His cheerfulness was a tonic to his patients ; and he had such a flow of conversation and could tell such droll stories, that a visit from him was a blessing to beguile the tediousness of convalescence.

In three months' time Dr. Mills was the most popular man in the town ; the poor praised his kindness, the better-off his skill ; all were grateful for the life he infused into the place.

In a town like Westford, so rich in spinsters, so sparingly supplied with marriageable bachelors, a man like Dr. Mills soon became the subject of many speculations and surmises.

Of course he meant to marry—what could he want with that roomy old house if he meant to inhabit it in solitude all his days ? Besides, he had lately been adding a few trifles to the drawing-room, and building out a conservatory over the staircase. But on whom would his choice fall ? Which of the Westford spinsters would secure the prize ? As yet, the most acute observer could not detect any definite attentions to one lady in particular. Dr. Mills was so attentive, so debonair to the whole female sex, that it was hard to say which of the eligible maidens or widows would win him. Of course there was a good deal of quiet "setting of caps" at him, and a good deal of contempt expressed by each lady at this conduct on the part of her neighbours.

We all settled that so sensible a man would select a partner of his own age ; and many were the secret hopes of the ladies who had passed early youth, but were still by no means unwilling to become brides.

The belle of our town—the dullest place must have its belle—was, of course, out of the reckoning. Ida Martin, beautiful and sweet as she was, being only nineteen, could not be thought of as a fit wife

for the doctor. I omitted to mention her in my list of our "upper ten thousand," though she belonged to that aristocratic section of the community. She resided with her grandmother, a blind old lady, widow of a London barrister, who had settled at Westford, partly for economy, partly because her early youth had been spent in the neighbourhood. Ida had a dull enough life with her aged relative, but she had occasional breaks to its monotony in the shape of visits to London to stay with a certain godmother, who petted her, and took her about, and would gladly have kept her altogether could the old lady have spared her. It was not wonderful that anyone should pet Ida; she was one of those bright, pretty, loving creatures who seem born to be caressed and admired. Had she been older, or the doctor younger, everyone would have predicted that she was the destined Mrs. Mills.

At the time my story commences Ida's godmother died, leaving her—"a fortune" the town gossips said—I believe, about £3,000. This was speedily magnified; and all, except her most intimate friends, spoke of her as a great heiress. I mention this, as it has a bearing on my story.

One fine winter's day I set out on one of the most detested duties of my life, a round of morning visits. But we were very martinets in social intercourse, and to neglect returning a call punctually was a serious crime; but Aunt Jane was confined to the house by a bad cold and it was imperative that I should take her place and pay our social debts.

So, rather grumblingly I fear, I dressed in my Sunday best, and set forth, card-case in hand, with an earnest hope that I should be lucky enough to find everyone out. Aunt Jane had started me so early, that I was afraid I should hardly give people time to get out after digesting their early dinners: so, to allow them every opportunity of escaping for an afternoon walk, I turned my steps first to Miss Virginia Craven's.

I did not owe a visit here, but I liked Miss Virginia; as indeed everyone must have done. She was a gentle, quiet, little old maid, who had passed her whole life in a state of abject subjection to a crusty old father and strong-minded elder sister. From early childhood these two had scolded and snubbed and generally repressed her. She was the gentlest and most unselfish of human beings, and never resented this even in thought. On the contrary, her father and "dear sister Maria" were her ideals of human excellence and goodness. When they died, the latter only a few years before my tale commences, Miss Virginia was inconsolable. Both had probably loved her after their fashion, but they had bad tempers, and Miss Virginia's meekness was too tempting.

"I don't know how I shall get on without Maria," sobbed the poor little lady, when "Maria's" sharp tongue was silenced for ever. "She always said I was too foolish to be allowed to act for myself. She

even ordered my caps for me, because she could not trust me to make a fright of myself."

I had been irreverent enough to think that Miss Virginia would have been rather of the mind of the man who engraved on his wife's tomb, "She is at rest, *and so am I.*" But such an idea never crossed the gentle lady's brain. Perhaps one misses even grumbling and scolding, if it has gone on for over fifty years; anyhow, Miss Virginia was a sincere mourner for her cankered sister.

Contrary to everyone's expectation, she did not take advantage of her new-acquired freedom. If the living Maria had ruled her despotically, the memory of the defunct was even more tyrannical. Sometimes, in her sister's life-time, Miss Virginia had faintly attempted to withstand certain arrangements in the household; now "dear Maria's plans" were sacred. Miss Virginia was chilly and rheumatic, but no parlour fires were permitted till November, be the autumn never so damp and cold. "Dear Maria so disliked my asking for fires earlier; she had no patience with people being cold," sighed Miss Virginia, as she wrapped herself in a shawl and sat shivering in loyal obedience to the wishes of the defunct Miss Maria.

Purchasing her garments cost her great searchings of heart; it is difficult to say what the taste of a departed relative would be in such matters; and Miss Virginia never bought even a new cap without long and anxious deliberation as to whether Maria would have approved it. The only thing she exercised her free-will in was in the far larger share of her little income that she bestowed in charity. Miss Maria had been a hard woman, impatient of poverty and trouble in others. Miss Virginia had the tenderest heart in the world; she would have given away the teeth out of her head, as her sister used to say in wrath; and in this case alone her heart was too much for her reverence for the deceased Maria's memory.

"I am afraid Maria would have blamed me—I am half afraid this would have displeased her," would Miss Virginia murmur to herself as she relieved some destitute object; but despite the self-accusing thought, the relief was bestowed. Perhaps she was sometimes imposed upon; but I know she was often a means of assisting real distress. I dare hardly whisper, in these days of repression of mendicity, that I think it is a lesser evil to relieve a few undeserving persons, than to neglect cases of actual need—I know some great societies think very differently.

It is needless to say Miss Virginia was not a clever woman, she had been too long repressed and kept under for that, but she was a thoroughly good one—gentle, loving, unselfish. Many a beauty, many a genius, might have envied the large heart, the tender sympathies of that much-faded little old maid. Absurd as her devotion to that crusty sister's memory was in one sense, it had its touching side, in the affection that clung to the companion of her childhood, in the humility that exalted another's plans above her own.

So when I entered on this winter's day, and found Miss Virginia with as bad a cold as Aunt Jane, sitting at a respectful distance from the fire, just as Miss Maria had always made her do, I rather admired her, though I felt how absurd she was.

"No, my dear," she said, in reply to my suggestion that she should take an arm-chair on the hearth-rug; "you know how extremely averse dear Maria always was to my hanging over the fire. She always objected to see me seat myself too near it."

I knew it was vain to combat the shade of Maria, so said no more.

We chatted a while, but it struck me that my old friend was in rather a nervous state. What could have happened to trouble the serenity of her existence? She had almost a guilty look—seemed fidgety and anxious. I began to suspect that some specially distressing case had come to her knowledge, that she had given more largely than Maria would have approved, and was now suffering remorse of conscience.

Winter days are short, and I began to be afraid that if I delayed too long my friends would have time to take a walk and be at home again to receive me, so I rose to take my leave. Then Miss Virginia's agitation increased.

"My dear Mary," she said, blushing and hesitating, "you must pass the post-office; would you—could you—is it troubling you to ask you to post this?" and she handed me a letter carefully sealed.

"Trouble? not the least," I answered, carelessly, thinking Miss Virginia had given *gold* somewhere, to be in such a nervous state. So I took the letter, and put it into my pocket.

And now I must go back a little, and enlighten the reader as to the cause of Miss Virginia's agitation. I heard all the story some years later.

The day before, she had been sitting tranquilly at work, when the post brought her a letter. This alone was a surprise, for she had no friend outside Westford, and Westford was not large enough for it to be worth while posting letters to each other. Neat little maid-servants carried all the invitations to tea-drinkings, &c., and the answer to these hospitable missives. Like many other people, Miss Virginia turned the letter round and round, and looked at the seal, and did everything but enlighten herself by opening it, as she wondered who it came from. Why, surely it was Dr. Mills's writing! Yes, the post-mark was London, and he had gone there for a few days, she knew. Could he have heard she was unwell, and had he written in kindness of heart to prescribe for her, gratis? He was on very friendly terms with Miss Virginia, as with all the town. She opened the letter; yes, it was signed "William Mills," but it contained no prescription.

I doubt if a bombshell exploding in the roof could have caused a greater shock to poor Miss Virginia than that innocent-looking letter.

She read it, stared helplessly at it, rubbed her spectacles to see the writing better, and then dropped it with an expression of utter confusion and perplexity. It was no other than *a proposal of marriage!*

Strange as it may seem, there was no doubt about it. The letter was duly addressed to "Miss Virginia Craven, Laburnum Cottage, Westford," and she knew the doctor's handwriting well enough. "My very dear lady," began the epistle, and it went on to a straightforward, downright offer of marriage. "I trust the slight disparity of our ages will not influence your decision; a few years on the husband's side is surely no drawback," concluded the writer.

Now Miss Virginia was probably a good six years older than the doctor—but this allusion did not displease her. In fact, after the first shock of amazement was over, she began to reflect seriously on the matter. To receive one's first proposal at fifty-one is certainly a little upsetting at first. The idea of becoming Mrs. Mills, or Mrs. anyone, in fact, had never entered Miss Virginia's brain.

Once, many years ago, there had been an idea that the assistant of old Dr. Channer had cast eyes of admiration at the younger Miss Craven, but this passing fancy was so sternly repressed by the vigilant Miss Maria that it never took the form of a definite proposal. "I wonder what Maria would think I ought to do," sighed Miss Virginia in her perplexity, but it was impossible to answer this question. She remembered her sister had been very indignant at the aforesaid episode of Dr. Channer's assistant; Miss Virginia still recollected the stern "Virginia, you are a fool—a conceited fool, who fancies everyone who looks at her is in love with her."

"But I was so young then," reasoned Miss Virginia, "and Mr. Gray was very poor—perhaps Maria would consider this a different case. But she would never have dreamt of Dr. Mills proposing to *me*. I never noticed anything particular in his attentions, yet he says I have been his admiration ever since he set foot in Westford, and he speaks of my beauty—oh dear!" And a blush crossed the old lady's withered cheek.

As no amount of puzzling would enlighten her regarding what the departed Maria's views would have been on the subject, Miss Virginia began to consider what her own were.

Certainly Dr. Mills was a very delightful man; certainly it would be very agreeable to be mistress of that nicely-furnished house. Her own income was a very minute one, barely sufficient to enable her to live on in the old house she had known so long. Dr. Mills was reputed rich, and evidently had plenty of money at command. His wife would be a person of importance in Westford society. Gentle and humble-minded as Miss Virginia was, she could not repress a slight feeling of pride at being thus selected to fill the post of honour which all the other single ladies were secretly aspiring to.

She rose and looked at herself in the glass. Well, perhaps she looked younger than she really was; anyway, Dr. Mills seemed to consider

her his junior. So, to make a long story short, Miss Virginia sat cogitating all the evening, slept on the matter, and at last wrote a modest acceptance of the doctor's suit.

Then came the difficulty—how to convey the precious missive to the post. Molly, the little handmaiden of sixteen, who constituted Miss Virginia's whole domestic establishment, was a sharp girl. She had already perceived that something unusual had taken place. Miss Virginia had come down late to breakfast, forgotten to give the cat her saucer of milk, let the urn overflow on the carpet, and after the breakfast things had been removed, instead of settling peaceably to her wonted knitting, had taken out her rarely-used desk, and was sitting writing, destroying half-finished letters, then commencing fresh epistles.

Molly was on the tiptoe of anxiety to know what all this meant—she made a dozen excuses for interrupting her mistress at her task, and each time made the most frantic efforts to catch a glimpse of what she was writing.

"That girl suspects something," thought poor Miss Virginia, her guilty consciousness sharpening her faculties. "Dear, dear, if I send her to the post with the letter, she is so sharp, she will guess everything, and the whole story will be over Westford before to-night. Dr. Mills will like to tell his own news, I am sure," and a bright flush dyed her cheek, as she thought with gentle complacency of the astonishment this "news" would be to her little world. After being so thoroughly nobody for so many years, she may be pardoned this little touch of vanity.

So it came to pass that when I appeared, Miss Virginia trusted me with the precious document, as before recorded.

I had not long departed, when a second visitor appeared—pretty Ida Martin.

"I am come full of apologies, Miss Virginia," she said, entering. "See—a letter for you I have actually been rude enough to open. It was addressed to me, so that pleads my excuse. But you ought to have had it before now, only it arrived while I was in London, yesterday. I only came back an hour ago, and found this awaiting me. I ran round with it at once, so as to give you time to answer it by post time to-day." And she held out a letter, in Dr. Mills's writing, addressed outside to "Miss Ida Martin," but commencing "Dear Miss Virginia."

A horrible doubt, a feeling that some dreadful mistake had taken place, rushed on Miss Virginia. She hastily glanced over the letter.

It was very short; merely a civil request for a receipt for a particular cake Miss Virginia was famous for, and which a sister of the doctor's was anxious to try. But in a postscript were the words, "I know all my kind Westford friends think it is time I brought a mistress to the old red-brick house—well, if fortune smiles on me, I may do so ere long. I hope to have news for the town when I return."

Poor Miss Virginia!—the room swam before her eyes. Evidently, yes, evidently, her prospects were “castles in the air.” Not for her was that fatal proposal intended. It was plain the doctor had put his letters into the wrong envelopes. And she had been foolish enough to think those flattering lines were addressed to herself—and to answer them! Oh, the shame of the whole proceeding!—could she ever show her face in Westford again?

Ida’s alarmed voice recalled her to herself.

“Dear Miss Virginia, you look so ill—what is the matter?”

“Oh, nothing—only my bad cold,” said the unhappy Miss Virginia, rallying herself with an heroic effort. “I think, my dear, there has been some mistake about these letters, for, do you know, I have one here evidently meant for you.”

Miss Virginia brought out the concluding sentence resolutely, resolved to veil her own folly as long as might be.

She handed Ida the epistle; the girl ran her eyes over it hastily, and then burst into a ringing laugh.

“Oh, Miss Virginia, did you read this absurd letter? an old fellow like that, whom I have not spoken to a dozen times! ‘Slight difference in years,’ why, he might be my grandfather! and to begin, ‘Dear lady,’ in that stilted style!—well, I did give Dr. Mills credit for possessing more common sense.”

A pause ensued—of amused surprise on the part of Ida, of speechless shame on the part of Miss Virginia.

“How you must have wondered who the letter was for,” said Ida, laughing again. “Miss Virginia, if I had not called round, would you have thought of forwarding it to me?”

Miss Virginia winced under the words. Was it not evident that no one would have imagined the letter was intended for her? and yet she, in her unutterable folly and vanity, had dared to imagine it. If Maria could have known all this!

“I suppose I ought to answer this absurd effusion,” said Ida, breaking in on the poor lady’s bitter self-reproaches, “especially as I am a day late already. There is your desk open invitingly—may I scribble a few lines now?” and at Miss Virginia’s faint assent she took her seat and wrote.

“I have been very civil, of course,” she said, laughing still as she folded her letter, “though it is really too absurd. Nearly a stranger to me, and such an old fellow. But, of course, Miss Virginia, we must keep this to ourselves. Unless,” she added slyly, “you will keep the letter, and take pity on him yourself.”

Alas! how little did Ida think her jesting words were but too true!

“I am in time for the post to-day,” Ida went on.

“In time for the post.” Miss Virginia shuddered. Unlucky Dr. Mills! It is not the fate of every man to receive, by the same post, a refusal from a lady to whom he has proposed, and an acceptance from one to whom he has offered no such honour.

However, repentance was out of the question, and Miss Virginia saw her visitor depart cheerfully, letter in hand.

Then did the gentle old lady sit down to bewail herself. To a person of Miss Virginia's modest nature the case was really a terrible one. How could she ever face Dr. Mills again? Would he not think her the vainest, most foolish old woman that ever existed? If Miss Virginia had felt younger than her actual fifty-one years in the first flush of surprise at that fatal letter, she now felt immeasurably older. She looked in the glass: never had her cap appeared so dowdy, her appearance so miserable.

"At my age to have imagined such a thing possible!" sighed the poor lady. "Oh, Maria was right—I am not fit to take care of myself." And she sighed and fretted, till her head ached, and she felt perfectly ill.

In this state I found her late in the afternoon, having looked in on my return from my walk, to bring her a pot of Aunt Jane's famous black-currant jelly, a panacea for sore throats and colds.

Miss Virginia thanked me kindly, but sadly—jelly could not sweeten such trouble as hers.

"Mary, my dear," said the old lady, nervously, as I rose to take my leave, "I gave you a letter."

A guilty flush rose to my cheek. I hastily felt in my pocket, and there was the letter still! Of course I had forgotten all about it, as amateur letter-carriers usually do.

"Oh, Miss Virginia, I am so *dreadfully* sorry," I exclaimed, producing the unlucky document. "What can I do?—the post is gone."

But my contrite apologies were cut short by Miss Virginia taking—I had almost written *snatching*—the letter from my hand, with an absolutely radiant countenance.

"It does not matter, my dear," she said, hastily, with an expression between laughing and crying; "the letter was of no consequence; that is, I mean, I wish to alter something in it—don't worry."

"Poor dear Miss Virginia," I thought, as I wended my way home, "she really is becoming very incoherent and eccentric."

I might have thought her more eccentric if I had seen her at that moment. Burning letters is generally considered a melancholy occupation; pretty, mournful pictures and poems have been painted and written on the subject; but nothing save happiness was visible on Miss Virginia's face as she pushed the letter into the hottest part of the fire, and held it with the poker till the last atom was consumed. Then she drew a long breath like one delivered from some terrible apprehension, and settled to her knitting in her wonted tranquil fashion. Molly, bringing in tea, opined that "missus looked like herself again."

In fact, the relief at the unlooked-for recovery of her letter had fairly blotted out any lingering disappointment at finding she was not to become Mrs. Mills, after all.

Enough that she might pursue her quiet tenor of life, blameless and respected, without such a terrible scandal transpiring as that she, at fifty-one years old, had accepted a man who had never proposed to her.

"I really think I should have died of the disgrace, if such a thing had got known over Westford," thought the poor lady, with a shudder.

It was three years or more before I heard the story I have now narrated. Harry and I had been married, and left Westford, and had come back for a week's visit to show Aunt Jane a baby—the baby of the creation—and to say good-bye before we sailed for India.

Of course the baby was an attraction to Miss Virginia, who had a passionate love of children; and she spent half her days at Aunt Jane's, "worshipping the child," as auntie's old servant (no baby-fancier) phrased it.

And one wet afternoon, when the idol had been cutting a tooth, and at last consented to doze in Miss Virginia's lap, she and I, waxing confidential, as women do over cradles, began to talk of old days together.

Laughing at the recollection of sundry acts of girlish carelessness, I learnt how *one* of my forgetful deeds had saved Miss Virginia much trouble. Even now her voice faltered and her cheek blushed as she told the story.

"It would have been such a disgrace you know, Mary, my dear," she repeated; "and, besides that, I had really a merciful escape altogether. Dr. Mills seems to have been quite a deception. I don't want to speak unkindly, but I am really afraid that he was not sincere in all he did here.

"After Ida refused him he proposed to Mrs. Crump—you remember Mrs. Crump, the rich farmer's widow—and, of course, she was only too proud to accept him. Everyone thought it was a sad marrying below his own rank, for you know Mrs. Crump was never in good circles in Westford; in fact, we were all quite vexed about it. I thought that perhaps he was really attached to Ida, and married in haste just because he was unhappy—people do that sometimes, you know. But I am afraid he only thought of money.

"Mrs. Crump—Mrs. Mills then—did not like Westford, so they left soon after their marriage, and went to London.

"There was some talk about bills left behind, and I know Mr. Bullen, the new doctor, who bought the practice and the house, grumbled a good deal, and said he had been deceived, but I don't know in what way. Mr. Simmonds, the lawyer here, wrote a great many letters to Dr. Mills, and Mrs. Jones, of the post-office, spoke of it, and I know Mr. Bullen was always calling at Mr. Simmonds'.

"At last letters came back both to Mr. Bullen and Mr. Simmonds, addressed by them to Dr. Mills, and marked, 'Gone away, no

address left ;' we heard about it from Patty, Mr. Bullen's servant, who found the empty envelopes in the fire-place. No one knew anything more till two months ago. And then—what do you think ?—poor Mrs. Crump, that was, came back to Westford.

"Poor thing ! it was *she* who made the bad marriage ; for Dr. Mills behaved very ill to her. It seems he was a clever doctor, but had been obliged to leave London because of some scandal ; I don't exactly know what, but it was something disgraceful, and, clever as he was, he lost all his practice there. So he came to a quiet place where he was not known ; and I am afraid he just married because he wanted money.

"He was dreadfully in debt when he married Mrs. Crump, and after they went to London he did nothing—only spent her money. She had never thought about settlements, so he had control of everything. And he treated her so ill, and drank, and altogether—I could not tell you what that poor woman went through.

"Things got so bad at last, that she threatened to apply for a divorce, and then he agreed to let her go if she paid him a certain sum a year. So, to avoid all the scandal of getting into the papers, she agreed to this—very foolishly Mr. Simmonds says—but Dr. Mills made her sign some papers, and she must pay the money now.

"Between this and all the sums he ran through in London, she is left quite poorly off, and has come back here to live because it is cheap. We are all sorry for her. We thought her presumptuous in marrying Dr. Mills, and some people said that she dressed quite out of her station, wearing satin and lace, which none of the first ladies in Westford could afford, and she only a farmer's widow ; but no one thinks of that now.

"So, if Dr. Mills had really asked me to marry him, it would have been a sad calamity, for I might " (why, she actually *had*) "have accepted him, and should have been a miserable woman all my life after.

"You are happy, my dear," and Miss Virginia kissed the sleeping child on her knee ; "but marriage is a great lottery. Poor Maria always said that if a woman married, she gave a proof that she was a fool ; and I really think the government must agree with her, for it seems when a woman is once married she can do so little in managing her own affairs. Poor Mrs. Mills says the lawyers tell her she cannot even make a will now—it seems hard."

And here Miss Virginia kissed the baby again, perhaps to hide the tears in her eyes ; whilst I was silent, feeling thankful that, after all, my forgetfulness had brought trouble upon no one, but the contrary. Wondering, too, it may be, why so often the best women are left behind in the race for Matrimony.

R E S T .

"There remaineth, therefore, a rest to the people of God."

God gave to man the earth all fair and glowing,
 Rich with sweet flowers and fruits, and lofty trees,
 And grassy vales, their pleasant shades bestowing,
 And thymy downs to greet the summer breeze.

God gave to man the sky all star-bespangled,
 His diamond footprints on the purple height,
 Changeless in beauty, through their maze entangled,
 To guide the way-worn wanderer aright.

God gave to man his nature's noble presence,
 His stately form and heaven-directed soul,
 His comprehensive mind and deathless essence,
 And bade all things acknowledge his control.

God gave to man his home's unbought affection,
 Where eyes of love his answering glance may meet ;
 Blest in fruition of his heart's selection,
 Gladly he homeward turns his weary feet.

God upon man all kindly gifts hath lavished,
 Save *one*, the dearly sought for and the best,
 With fairest sights and sounds each sense hath ravished,
 Yet here in vain may man demand for *rest*.

He finds it not in shady glades reposing,
 He finds it not the starry heavens among,
 Nor even when, his home around him closing,
 He lists at sunset to his children's song.

God keeps back rest alone, that the world-weary,
 E'en though his cup high mantles to the brim,
 Or though his fate be desolate and dreary,
 May seek and find repose alone in HIM !

M. I. P.

